

October 7, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy:

As you work toward a final spending agreement for fiscal year 2020, the undersigned organizations representing students, veterans, colleges, consumers, financial aid administrators, college access providers, unions, researchers, scholarship providers, education advocates, and civil rights advocates write to stress the critical importance of protecting and investing in the Pell Grant program. We greatly appreciate that the Senate's proposed Labor-HHS-Education spending bill includes a \$135 increase to the maximum Pell award, which will ensure that the grant at least keeps pace with inflation.

However, we strongly urge you to oppose the overall Labor-HHS-Education spending allocation and the accompanying proposed \$1.3 billion rescission from the Pell reserve fund and to instead fully retain all current Pell funds where they belong — in the Pell Grant program. A \$1.3 billion cut would put much-needed investments to strengthen Pell further out of reach. This cut would also place the program at risk of future cuts to grant amounts or eligibility that would exacerbate student debt and limit access to higher education.

As you know, Pell Grants are the foundation of our national investment in higher education. They allow more than seven million low- and middle-income students — including nearly 60 percent of Black undergraduates and almost half of Latino undergraduates — to attend and complete college. College graduates have higher wages and lower unemployment rates than their peers without degrees, and Pell Grants are one of the keystones for growing a diverse, robust workforce and economy.

The current maximum Pell Grant already covers less than one-third of the cost of attending a four-year public college — the lowest share in more than 40 years. Pell Grant recipients today are more than twice as likely as other students to have student loans, and recipients who borrow graduate with over \$4,500 more debt than their higher income peers.

At a time when a postsecondary credential or degree is an increasingly necessary gateway to a meaningful career, a strong Pell Grant is critical to ensuring that students from all financial backgrounds are able to participate and grow a strong, diverse economy. We therefore urge you to protect this critical program and reject the proposed \$1.3 billion rescission without cutting funding from any other education program, and to provide adequate resources to support all of the important programs in this appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers  
American Federation of Teachers  
Americans for Financial Reform  
Associated Students of the University of California

Association of Big Ten Students  
Association of Young Americans (AYA)  
Cal State Student Association  
California Competes  
California EDGE Coalition  
Center for Responsible Lending  
Consumer Action  
Consumer Reports  
Deeds Action Fund  
Democrats for Education Reform  
Education Reform Now Advocacy  
*Excelencia* in Education  
Faculty Association of California Community Colleges  
Foothill-De Anza Community College District  
Generation Progress  
Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce  
Higher Education Loan Coalition (HELC)  
Higher Learning Advocates  
Hildreth Institute  
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities  
Jobs for the Future (JFF)  
John Burton Advocates for Youth  
Jolt Initiative  
KIPP  
LeadMN – College Students Connecting for Change  
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce  
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition  
NAACP  
NACAC  
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)  
National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs (NASSGAP)  
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA)  
National Campus Leadership Council  
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)  
National Education Association  
National Skills Coalition  
National Urban League  
New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)  
PHENOM (Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts)  
Raise the Barr  
Scholarship America  
Shasta College  
Silicon Valley Leadership Group  
Student Debt Crisis  
Student Parent HELP Center  
Student Veterans of America  
The Campaign for College Opportunity  
The Education Trust

The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)  
U.S. Public Interest Research Group (USPIRG)  
uAspire  
UNCF (United Negro College Fund, Inc.)  
Univ. of Hawai'i – Bridge to Hope  
University of California Student Association  
Veterans Education Success  
Women Employed  
Woodstock Institute  
Yes We Must Coalition  
Young Invincibles

cc: The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chairwoman, House Appropriations Committee; The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee