September 14, 2021

Dear Representative/Senator:

On behalf of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities and the undersigned organizations representing the nation’s private, nonprofit colleges and universities, we write to ask you to use the budget reconciliation process to establish the pathway toward doubling the Pell Grant maximum to $13,000.

We are proud that our sector serves roughly the same percentage of Pell recipients as our four-year public colleagues and that together with them provide a wide array of educational opportunities unique to our nation. Providing a generational increase in the Pell Grant maximum in the final reconciliation bill would transform the educational trajectory of students everywhere.

We appreciate the significant funding provided for higher education in the “Build Back Better” bill written by the House Committee on Education and Labor, including a $500 increase in the Pell Grant maximum. We would also be remiss if we did not acknowledge the many positive aspects of the bill, such as funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs); establishing the ability of active duty service members to still qualify for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program; enabling DACA students to qualify for federal student aid; and establishing a completion grant program that includes private, nonprofit institutions.

However, we challenge Congress to be bolder in its support for the Pell Grant, a cornerstone federal student aid program.

Doubling the Pell Grant is the most effective, efficient, and equitable way to tackle college affordability and debt for low- and middle-income students and it can happen immediately. By expanding an existing and successful program, increased grant aid can reach students quickly and help speed up our nation’s recovery from the pandemic. Doubling the Pell Grant would also provide critical resources for housing and food, among other expenses.

Not only would doubling the Pell Grant make college more affordable for students in every sector, it also makes community college free for those Pell students who choose that path to further their educational goals and objectives.

Since the pandemic began, college enrollment is down 13% across all of higher education, and financial aid applications are down 6% for low-income students. We are on the cusp of losing a generation of students. Doubling Pell as part of the post-pandemic recovery will ensure this generation of Americans receives the education and training they need to both move up the economic ladder and get the economy working again, while helping America compete in a global economy that demands high skills.

Not only do Pell Grants help students with tuition, they also provide vital resources for other costs of attendance. The coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the existing “basic needs insecurity” facing many low-income college students on all types of campuses. Doubling Pell in the reconciliation bill
would give low-income and working-class students the jump start they need to stay in school and recover from the pandemic. It would also be a critical investment in the future of our nation and our citizens and an effective and proven way to break the cycle of generational poverty.

Increasing the Pell Grant maximum to $13,000 will help current students in all sectors of higher education. It will also help students considering a higher education to choose the college or university that best fits their educational needs.

While increasing Pell Grants is the single most important improvement Congress could make to this legislation, other suggested improvements to ensure equitable treatment for our sector include:

- Including all Title III institutions in the programs outlined in the bill by adding a provision and funding stream for institutions that qualify for the Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP) as well as two-year private colleges if they continue to be excluded from any America’s College Promise program. Provide additional funding for Title III institutions in the vital areas of infrastructure and research;
- Protecting all state grant aid that helps students meet unmet need and allowing states to put any excess funding from the America’s College Promise program into programs that include students at private, nonprofit colleges and universities;
- Relying on the traditional federal definition of community colleges, which includes private, nonprofit two year institutions, if America’s College Promise program is going to be funded; and
- Guaranteeing that private, nonprofit colleges that wish to be included in state completion programs can participate and be provided equitable resources for their work.

With over 1,700 institutions, serving more than 5 million students in all 50 states, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, along with our undersigned colleagues and member associations, represent the diversity of private, nonprofit higher education in the United States. Our institutions include major research universities, faith-based colleges, HBCUs, MSIs, TCUs, art and design colleges, traditional liberal arts, health sciences institutions, women’s colleges, work colleges, two-year colleges, and schools of law, medicine, engineering, business and other professions.

Thank you for your consideration of our views and for your continued support for our institutions and the students we serve.

Sincerely,

Barbara K. Mistick, D.M.
President

In partnership with:
Alabama Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
American Association of Presidents of Independent Colleges and Universities
Asociacion de Colegios y Universidades Privadas de Puerto Rico
Associated Colleges of the Midwest
Association for Biblical Higher Education
Association of Advanced Rabbinical & Talmudic Schools
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
Association of Chiropractic Colleges
Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU)
Association of Independent Colleges & Universities of Rhode Island
Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Pennsylvania
Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts
Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio
Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design
Association of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities
Association of Vermont Private Colleges
Conference for Mercy Higher Education
Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges
Consortium on Financing Higher Education
Consortium of Hospital-Affiliated Colleges and Universities (CHACU)
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Council of Independent Colleges
Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia
Council of Independent Nebraska Colleges
Federation of Independent Illinois Colleges and Universities
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM)
Georgia Independent College Association
Great Lakes Colleges Association
Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida
Independent Colleges and Universities of Missouri
Independent Colleges and Universities of New Jersey
Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas
Independent Colleges of Indiana
Independent Colleges of Washington
International Association of Baptist Colleges and Universities
Iowa Association of Ind. Colleges and Universities
Kansas Independent College Association
Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
Maryland Independent College and University Association (MICUA)
Michigan Independent Colleges & Universities
Minnesota Private College Council
Network of Colleges and Universities, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
New American Colleges and Universities
North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities
Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities
South Carolina Independent Colleges & Universities
Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities
Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools - TRACS
West Virginia Independent Colleges & Universities
Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

Work Colleges Consortium

Yes We Must Coalition