



WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
1156 15TH STREET, NW SUITE 915 · WASHINGTON, DC 20005 · P (202) 463-2940 · F (202) 463-2953
E-MAIL: WASHINGTONBUREAU@NAACPNET.ORG · WEB ADDRESS WWW.NAACP.ORG

ACTION ALERT

DATE: March 1, 2018
TO: Concerned Parties
FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director, NAACP Washington Bureau

NAACP-SUPPORTED BILL WOULD INCREASE PELL GRANT PURCHASING POWER AND ELIGIBILITY

THE PELL GRANT PRESERVATION AND EXPANSION ACT WOULD EXPAND AND PERMANENTLY SAFEGUARD THE PELL GRANT PROGRAM, HELPING MILLIONS OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES OFFSET THE RISING COSTS OF A U.S. COLLEGE EDUCATION

THE ISSUE:

A Pell Grant is money the federal government provides for low- and moderate-income students who need assistance to pay for college. Grants, unlike loans, do not have to be repaid. Students eligible for Pell grants receive a specified amount each year under this program. Pell Grants are critically important in ensuring access to postsecondary education for low- and middle-income students. The program is the foundation of the federal government's historic commitment to higher education access. Each year, more than 7.5 million students rely on Pell grants to afford college. The vast majority of Pell recipients have family incomes under \$40,000. Pell grants make higher education accessible to groups which have historically been shut out of colleges and universities, including racial and ethnic minority American students: more than 60% of African-American undergraduates and more than half of Hispanic undergraduates rely on Pell Grants to attend school. All in all, more than one-third of all undergraduate students received a Pell grant for the 2013-2014 school year.

Sadly, the money available for Pell grants has been eroding for decades. Add to this the skyrocketing cost of college, and the result is that Pell grants do not go as far as they used to; in fact, the current maximum grant covers the lowest share of public college costs in over 40 years. The cost of obtaining a college degree has increased 1,120 percent over the past three decades, about five times the rate of inflation. The maximum grant in the first year of the program was \$452, which covered almost all of a student's tuition, since the average tuition at public universities in 1973 was \$490. By 2011 however, the average in-state tuition was \$8,244, while the maximum Pell Grant was \$5,550. Due largely to cuts in state education budgets, college tuition has grown by 50% from 2004 to 2014. As recently as in the 1980s, the maximum Pell Grant covered just over half the cost of attending a four-year public college. In the 2014-2015 school year, however, the maximum Pell Grant (\$5,730) is expected to cover less than one-third of the cost of a public 4-year college—the lowest purchasing power level since the start of the program. What's more, Pell Grants are slated to lose its annual inflation adjustment after this year, and Congress continues to cut the money that is available for Pell grants: earlier this year, \$1.3 billion was cut and billions more is being proposed to be cut in 2018. Furthermore, eligibility for Pell grants has been restricted: inmates of state and federal prisons became ineligible for Pell grants in 1994.

To address these problems, Congresswoman Susan Davis (CA) and Congressman Robert "Bobby" Scott (VA) along with Senators Mazie Hirono (HI) and Patty Murray (WA) have introduced H.R. 2452 / S. 1135, the *Pell Grant Preservation and Expansion Act*. This legislation would improve the purchasing power of Pell Grants (by providing an immediate \$500 increase to the maximum award and grow the value of the Pell Grant over time by permanently indexing it to inflation); shifts the Pell Grant program to fully mandatory funding; reduces the "work penalty" that many students face when working to support themselves and offset rising college costs; streamlines the financial aid process for the poorest students and ensures they can easily access a full Pell Grant; and extends eligibility for a Pell grant from the current 12 semesters to 14. The legislation also expands eligibility by extending Pell grant eligibility to undocumented students who were brought to this country as children ("DREAMers"), and restoring eligibility for defrauded students, incarcerated individuals, and students with non-violent drug convictions.

[More...](#)

THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:

Contact your Representative and both your Senators and **URGE THEM TO SUPPORT AND CO-SPONSOR H.R. 2452 / S. 1135, THE PELL GRANT PRESERVATION AND EXPANSION ACT.** To contact your Senators and Representative, you may:

✓ **Make a Phone Call:**

Call your Senators and your Representative in Washington by dialing the Capitol Switchboard and asking to be transferred to your Senators'/Congressman's offices. The switchboard phone number is **(202) 224-3121** (see message section, below).

✓ **Write a Letter**

To write letters to your Senators, send them to:
The Honorable (name of Senator)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

To write a letter to your Representative, send it to:
The Honorable (name of Representative)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**A SAMPLE
LETTER IS
ATTACHED**

✓ **Send a Fax**

If you would like to send a fax, call your Senators' or Representative's offices (through the Capitol switchboard) and ask for their fax numbers (you can use either the attached sample letter or the message box, below).

✓ **Send an E-Mail**

To send an e-mail to your Senators, go to www.senate.gov; click on "*Find Your Senators*". Look up your Senators by state; go to their web sites for e-mail addresses. To send an e-mail to your Representative, go to www.house.gov, and click on "*Write Your Representative*" (on the left hand side, just under "find your Representative"). This will help you identify who your congressman is and how to contact him/her.

REMEMBER TO CONTACT BOTH YOUR SENATORS!!!!

THE MESSAGE

- A college degree dramatically increases employment opportunities and wage range. Young adults with only a high school diploma are more than two and a half times as likely to be unemployed, and earn three-fifths as much as those with at least a bachelor's degree.
- Pell grants make higher education accessible to groups which have historically been shut out of colleges and universities, including racial and ethnic minority American students: more than 60% of African-American undergraduates and more than half of Hispanic undergraduates rely on Pell Grants to attend school. All in all, more than one-third of all undergraduate students received a Pell grant for the 2013-2014 school year.
- Pell Grants are critically important in ensuring access to postsecondary education for low- and middle-income students.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!

If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

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Sample Letter

(date)

The Honorable _____
United States Senate / House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510 / 20515

RE: STRONG SUPPORT FOR H.R. 2452 / S. 1135, THE PELL GRANT PRESERVATION AND EXPANSION ACT.

Dear Senator / Representative _____;

As your constituent, I would like to express my support for H.R. 2452 / S. 1135, the *Pell Grant Preservation and Expansion Act*. Pell Grants are critically important in ensuring access to postsecondary education for low- and middle-income students. Given the increasing importance of a college education, as well as the rapidly increasing cost, I strongly urge you to support the expansion of eligibility requirements for Pell grant recipients back to their original levels (including allowing incarcerated men and women to be eligible for a Pell grant); support an increase in the maximum amount of a Pell Grant so that it begins to keep up with the cost of a post-secondary education; and to resist any move to further reduce funding for the program or to place additional restrictions on who can receive the funding.

A college degree dramatically increases employment and wages. Young adults with only a high school diploma are more than two and a half times as likely to be unemployed, and earn three-fifths as much as those with at least a bachelor's degree. Pell grants make higher education accessible to groups which have historically been shut out of colleges and universities, including racial and ethnic minority American students: more than 60% of African-American undergraduates and more than half of Hispanic undergraduates rely on Pell Grants to attend school. All in all, more than one-third of all undergraduate students received a Pell grant for the 2013-2014 school year.

Pell grants do not go as far as they used to given the skyrocketing cost of college; in fact, the current maximum grant covers the lowest share of public college costs in over 40 years. The cost of obtaining a college degree has increased 1,120 percent over the past three decades, about five times the rate of inflation. The *Pell Grant Preservation and Expansion Act* would improve the purchasing power of Pell Grants (by providing an immediate \$500 increase to the maximum award and grow the value of the Pell Grant over time by permanently indexing it to inflation); shifts the Pell Grant program to fully mandatory funding and expands eligibility by extending Pell grant eligibility to "DREAMers", and restoring eligibility for defrauded students, incarcerated individuals, and students with non-violent drug convictions.

Again, I strongly urge you to support for H.R. 2452 / S. 1135, the *Pell Grant Preservation and Expansion Act* and to resist any additional cuts in funding for the program or additional restrictions on who can apply for Pell grants. Please contact me in the very near future to let me know of your position on this important program and to let me know what more I can do to advocate for it.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and
remember to include your address)

***Remember to contact your
Representative and BOTH
your Senators.***