

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 21, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Capito and Ranking Member Baldwin:

As you begin your work on Fiscal Year 2027 (FY 2027) appropriations, we urge the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Subcommittee to make sure the Federal Pell Grant program is funded at a level that meets the needs of students, keeping pace with inflation and preventing cuts that would keep talented students from pursuing postsecondary education.

Pell Grants are the cornerstone of federal student aid and help over 7 million students pursue higher education in the United States every year. However, with the Congressional Budget Office estimating large shortfalls in Pell Grant funding starting with the current fiscal year, it is essential that the Subcommittee advocate for and secure a larger allocation for FY 2027, and increase funding for Pell Grants, to ensure that eligible students can continue to participate in the program and will not see their grants reduced.

The current increase in the number of Pell Grants is a success story and a direct result of Congress's bipartisan *FAFSA Simplification Act*, which made it easier for students to pursue higher education. These gains must be sustained—not cut short. In prior cases of Pell Grant shortfalls, millions of students with low incomes lost access to Pell Grants and other federal student aid programs. Eligibility cuts typically fall hardest on working adults and those who are trying to raise a family. Today, the average Pell Grant recipient is 25 years old, more than a quarter have dependent children, nearly a third (32 percent) work least 40 hours per week, and 21 percent work two or more jobs while going to school.<sup>1</sup> **New eligibility restrictions must be avoided, and we encourage you to prioritize maintaining current eligibility while ensuring that the maximum grant is not further eroded by inflation.**

We appreciate the LHHS Subcommittee's work to protect the Pell Grant maximum award but also note that it is overdue for an increase, having been frozen since the 2022-2023 award year and losing about \$470 in value to inflation during that time. The value of the maximum award has steadily declined since it was first created and now covers the lowest share of the average

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<sup>1</sup> Calculations from the U.S. Department of Education. (2023). *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study 2019-20*. National Center for Education Statistics.

cost of attendance in the program's more than 50-year history. While the growth of college tuition and fees has recently slowed, students' cost of living has continued to rise dramatically—especially housing, food, and transportation—which has placed greater strain on the students and families that the program was designed to help. Three in five students experience severe housing or food insecurity or even homelessness.<sup>2</sup> Over the long-term, we should recommit to restoring the purchasing power of the Pell Grant, move the program toward fully mandatory funding to protect against future shortfalls, and work towards doubling the maximum award.

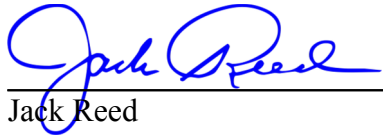
With a continued investment in Pell Grants, we can better extend educational opportunity to more students from low- and moderate-income families, who will be critical to meeting the demand for a highly educated-workforce in the coming years.

Thank you for your continued work to maintain and expand access to Pell Grants. We appreciate your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,



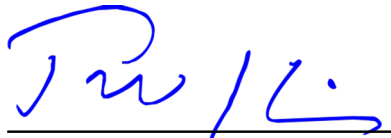
Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



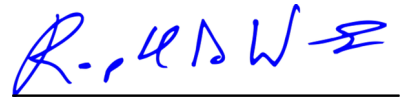
Jack Reed  
United States Senator



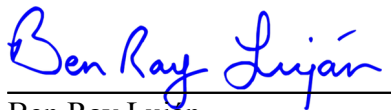
Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



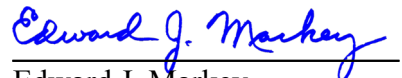
Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator

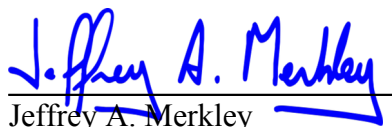


Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

<sup>2</sup> [The Hope Center 2023-2024 Student Basic Needs Survey Report](#). (February 26, 2025). The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs at Temple University.



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Peter Welch  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff  
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen  
U.S. Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Ruben Gallego  
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Lisa Blunt Rochester  
United States Senator



Andy Kim  
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United States Senator



Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



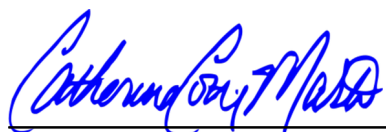
Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



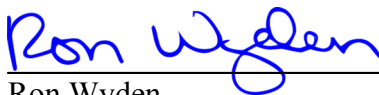
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



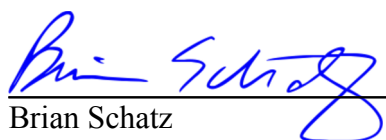
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



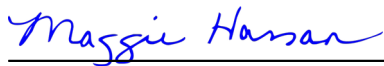
Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



Jon Ossoff  
United States Senator



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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Elissa Slotkin  
United States Senator



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Angela D. Alsobrooks  
United States Senator



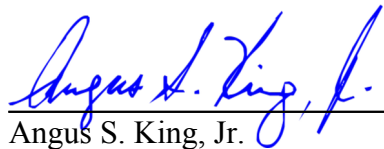
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Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



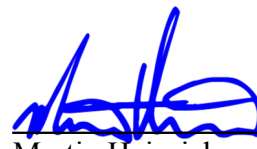
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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



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Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



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Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator