

June 6, 2014

Honorable Mary Landrieu
U.S. Senate
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Mazie Hirono
U.S. Senate
330 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Landrieu and Hirono:

Our organizations—which work with students and consumers on college access and civil rights—write in support of your Creating Higher Education Affordability Necessary to Compete Economically (CHANCE) Act. This bill would remove some of the financial barriers that make it difficult for hardworking low- and moderate-income students to afford and successfully complete a postsecondary education.

Nearly nine million Americans depend on Pell Grants to attend and complete college. Moreover, *more than 60%* of African-American undergraduates and *half* of Hispanic undergraduates rely on Pell Grants to attend school.

Research has shown that need-based grant aid, like Pell Grants, increases college enrollment among low- and moderate-income students and reduces their likelihood of dropping out. But, over the last three decades the buying power of the Pell Grant has decreased alarmingly. As recently as in the 1980s, the maximum Pell Grant covered more than half the cost of attending a four-year public college. Next year, however, the maximum Pell Grant (\$5,730 in 2014-15) is expected to cover less than one-third of the cost of college—the lowest purchasing power level since the start of the program.

Your bill will increase the maximum Pell Grant award by \$4,040, restore year-round awards so that more students may continue their studies in the summer, and increase a student's Pell eligibility to 15 semesters so that it aligns with existing satisfactory academic progress regulations. These are critical improvements that will allow the Pell program to better accomplish its mission of helping low- and moderate-income students access and complete college.

At a time of record income inequality and stalled economic mobility, Pell Grants are one of the keystones of restoring opportunity in our country. They enable the neediest among us to get the postsecondary education required to increase their earning potential and keep America competitive in the global economy. Quite simply, for many hardworking students they are the difference between going to college and going nowhere.

Thank you for your effort through the CHANCE Act to improve the Pell Grant program for hard-working students from low-income families. We strongly support this legislation and look forward to working with you to see it become law.

Sincerely,

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)

American Federation of Teachers

American Student Association of Community Colleges

Campaign for America's Future

Center for Law and Social Policy

Crittenton Women's Union

Democrats for Education Reform

Demos

Generation Progress

Minnesota State University Student Association

NAACP

National Association for College Admission Counseling

National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)

National Council of La Raza

National Education Association

National Skills Coalition

National Women's Law Center

One Wisconsin Now

OurTime.org

The Education Trust

The Institute for College Access & Success

U.S. PIRG

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

United Negro College Fund

United States Students Association

Young Invincibles