



February XX, 2021

California Congressional Delegation  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of Congress,

We are writing you today about a matter of urgency to today's students, as well as the future of affordable higher education in California. As the official representatives of California's students, higher education segments, and the state Student Financial Aid Commission, we are writing to urge you and your colleagues to prioritize doubling the maximum award of the Pell Grant, the largest and most important federal financial aid investment.

Each year Pell Grants help over seven million low-income students afford college. Pell Grants boost college enrollment, reduce drop-out rates, and improve student outcomes. However, despite their proven success, Pell Grants now cover a smaller and continuously shrinking share of college costs for students. Forty years ago, the Pell Grant covered more than 75 percent of a student's total costs of attending a public four-year institution; over time, disinvestment in the Pell Grant program has eroded the purchasing power of the award to the point that it now only covers 28 percent of those costs. Failure to meaningfully increase the maximum award and program funding level of the Pell Grant will jeopardize its continued impact in making higher education more accessible and affordable.

The COVID-19 health crisis only exacerbated the financial strain faced by so many of today's college students. Students were already struggling to cover the costs of food, housing, transportation, and childcare before the health crisis caused campus closures and student displacement. More than seven of ten California college students have reported that they or their families have lost some or all of their income due to COVID-19. Many students have now found themselves unemployed and uncertain about what the future holds for their education.<sup>1</sup> Now, more than ever, it is important that Congress prioritize financial resources for students' basic needs. Their livelihoods – not just their success as students – depends on it.

We understand and appreciate the many competing demands on federal resources as you consider how to position our country and communities to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. Doubling the Pell Grant not only will help to provide as much relief as possible for California's college students, but also

---

<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 Student Survey, California Student Aid Commission (2020): <https://www.csac.ca.gov/survey2020>

serve as an essential investment toward our economic recovery. Investing in college affordability will support individuals displaced by the economic disruption wrought by COVID-19 in re-skilling and earning postsecondary credentials that will position them for successful careers. Today's college students will be crucial to our nation's economic recovery in the years to come.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and service on behalf of California. If you have questions, please contact the California Student Aid Commission's Legislative Analyst, Melissa Bardo at [Melissa.Bardo@csac.ca.gov](mailto:Melissa.Bardo@csac.ca.gov) or (916) 844-4609.

Sincerely,

Marlene L. Garcia  
Executive Director, California Student Aid Commission

[Add signatories names, titles, and organizations here]

**CC:**

Governor Gavin Newsom  
Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis  
California State Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins  
California State Senate Minority Leader Scott Wilk  
California State Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon  
California State Assembly Republican Leader Marie Waldron