



May 9, 2019

The Honorable Susan Davis
Chair, Higher Education and
Workforce Investment Subcommittee,
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lloyd Smucker
Ranking Member, Higher Education and
Workforce Investment Subcommittee,
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Davis and Smucker:

On behalf of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), I want to thank you for hosting a bipartisan series of hearings on issues central to reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. For more than five decades, CGS has served as the national organization dedicated solely to advancing graduate education and research. Our membership includes nearly 500 institutions of higher education in the United States, Canada, and abroad. Collectively, our members confer 87 percent of all U.S. doctorates and the majority of U.S. master's degrees. CGS appreciates the opportunity to submit the following comments in advance of the third hearing, "The Cost of Non-Completion: Improving Student Outcomes in Higher Education" scheduled for this Thursday, May 9.

CGS urges the subcommittee to consider how the Pell Grant program can encourage completion at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. As you are aware, the Pell Grant program has been largely successful at providing access to undergraduate education for low-income and underrepresented students for over five decades.¹ Since the program was initially enacted, the needs of our communities and the workforce have changed substantially. The nation's population continues to diversify, while careers requiring a master's or doctoral degree at entry-level—including in fields such as healthcare and education—are projected to be among the fastest-growing through 2026.² Modernizing the Pell Grant is a way to meet these demands.

More specifically, we propose that individuals who have not exhausted the full 12 semesters of support allowable by law be able to utilize any remaining semesters of support towards graduate education. In doing so, we believe that current undergraduate and prospective graduate students would be further incentivized to complete their undergraduate degree "on-time," knowing they can allocate remaining support towards a graduate degree. Similarly, the ability to access remaining semesters of Pell while pursuing graduate education—provided the individual remains income-eligible—would assist students in completing their graduate degree. This proposal was included in the Aim Higher Act (H.R. 6543) introduced last Congress.

¹ U.S. Department of Education (September 2015). *Trends in Pell Grant Receipt and the Characteristics of Pell Grant Recipients: Selected Years, 1999–2000 to 2011–12*. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015601.pdf>.

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2017). Occupational outlook handbook. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>.

National indicators show that the number of graduate students who received Pell as undergraduates continues to grow.³ According to the most recent data from the Department of Education, in Academic Year (AY) 2015-2016, nearly 46 percent of first-year graduate and professional students were former Pell recipients, an increase from 32.5 percent in AY 2007-2008 and 35.9 percent in AY 2011-2012.⁴ **These data further show that just 6.5 percent of domestic graduate students have received Pell Grants for six years or more, while 34.6 percent did not fully exhaust all 12 semesters of Pell Grants they are eligible for under current law. Therefore, a significant portion of graduate students—arguably those most in need of financial support—could benefit from utilizing their remaining semesters of Pell.**

This proposal stays true to the mission of Pell in that it continues to provide access to economically disadvantaged and historically underserved populations. Enacting it could help ensure more diverse student bodies at institutions of higher education, leading to a more representative workforce and enabling these individuals to better serve communities with greater need. Additionally, it could also provide further incentive for more timely completion of a degree, while at the same time limiting the need to borrow.

Again, we thank you for examining ways to promote college completion. If we can be a resource to you or your staff as you consider this and other issues related to graduate education, please contact CGS's Vice President of Public Policy and Government Affairs, Lauren Inouye, at Linouye@cgs.nche.edu or (202)-461-3864.

Sincerely,



Suzanne T. Ortega
President

³ Okahana, H. (2018). Data sources: increasing number of graduate and professional students are former Pell recipients. Retrieved from: <https://cgsnet.org/data-sources-increasing-number-graduate-and-professional-students-are-former-pell-recipients-0>

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2015-16.