



June 20, 2019

The Honorable Ann McLane Kuster
United States House of Representatives
320 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Fred Upton
United States House of Representatives
2183 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kim Schrier
United States House of Representatives
1123 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tim Burchett
United States House of Representatives
1122 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harley Rouda
United States House of Representatives
2300 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Kuster, Upton, Schrier, Burchett, and Rouda,

On behalf of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), I am writing in support of the *Expanding Access to Graduate Education Act* (H.R. 3334), introduced on June 19, 2019. For more than five decades, CGS has served as the national organization dedicated 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 is committed to improving access to and affordability of graduate education, which includes ensuring that individuals from all socio-economic backgrounds can pursue a graduate degree.

For over five decades, the Pell Grant program has been largely successful at providing access to undergraduate education for low-income and underrepresented students.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 health care and education—are projected to be among the fastest-growing through 2026.² Ensuring that these sectors are representative is critical, and modernizing the Pell Grant is a way to address and meet these demands.

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

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. (2018). Occupational outlook handbook. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>.

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>

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 in AY 2015-2016, just 6.5 percent of domestic graduate students have received Pell Grants for six years or more, and 34.6 percent did not fully exhaust all 12 semesters of Pell Grants they are eligible for under current law.⁴ Therefore, a significant portion of graduate students—arguably those most in need of financial support—could benefit from utilizing their remaining semesters of Pell. H.R. 3334 would allow them to do exactly that.

CGS believes that allowing graduate students who were former Pell recipients to continue utilizing Pell towards a graduate degree—as long as they have remaining Pell semesters and continue to be income eligible—has several significant benefits both for the individual student, the public, and the economy. First, 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 an undergraduate degree, while at the same time limiting the need to borrow. This is of particular note as former Pell recipients in graduate school are more likely to take out student loans to finance their education and tend to have larger amounts of undergraduate debt as compared to non-Pell recipients.⁴

Furthermore, CGS has found that for underrepresented minorities in the STEM fields, earning a master's degree increases the likelihood of completing their doctoral education.⁵ Thus, allowing graduate students to fully exhaust their Pell support could also serve as a way to diversify both bench scientists as well faculty across the breadth of higher education, from community colleges to four-year institutions.

Again, we thank you for introducing H.R. 3334. 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

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

⁵ Sowell, R., Allum, J., & Okahana, H. (2015). [Doctoral initiative on minority attrition and completion](#). Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools.