

## **Rep. Kuster: Expanding Access to Graduate Education Act**

### **Background**

Graduate degree holders are an economic driver. They are entrepreneurs, job-creators, researchers, and innovators who serve their communities. By 2020, over six million jobs will require a graduate degree.<sup>1</sup> Further, occupations requiring a master's or doctoral degree at entry level—including public-service oriented careers in fields such as education and health care—are projected to be among the fastest growing over the next decade.<sup>2</sup> To meet these growing demands, it is critical to continue to make graduate education more affordable and provide access to underserved populations. More education also provides an avenue for individuals to improve their lives which may include purchasing a home, having a family, investing in their future, and saving for retirement. However, graduate students currently have few options outside of loans as a means of financing their education. This presents a significant barrier, particularly for low-income and underrepresented students.

### **Pell Grants for Graduate Students**

To ensure the strength of our economy and provide opportunities for advancement, Congress should prioritize efforts to make a graduate degree more accessible and affordable. Rep. Kuster's legislation would allow individuals who received a Pell Grant for at least one semester of their undergraduate education to utilize their remaining Pell eligibility towards their first postbaccalaureate degree. Under current federal law, students are prohibited from doing so. Since Pell Grants do not need to be repaid, this legislation may help reduce the debt burden of graduate students.

### **Benefits**

The average student at a four-year public institution completes their undergraduate education in 5.2 years (or just over 10 semesters).<sup>3</sup> At the same time, in Academic Year 2015-16, 45.8 percent of first-year graduate and professional students had received Pell Grants, and 34.6 percent of that group did not use all 12 semesters of support currently allowed under law.<sup>4</sup> Rep. Kuster's legislation would allow a student to use their remaining eligibility towards their graduate education, so long as they remain income-eligible.

This legislation would continue Pell's initial purpose of providing access to higher education for low-income and historically underrepresented individuals, while modernizing it to meet the demands of the current workforce. It would also create an incentive for students who wish to pursue a graduate degree to complete their undergraduate degree as quickly as possible, thereby allowing students to put more semesters of Pell eligibility towards their graduate education.

### **Support this legislation**

To cosponsor this legislation or if you have any questions, please contact Will Pisano in Rep. Kuster's office: [will.pisano@mail.house.gov](mailto:will.pisano@mail.house.gov).

---

<sup>1</sup> Carnevale, A., Smith, N., Strohl, J. (2013, June). *Recovery: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2020*. Washington, D.C., page 20.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018). Occupational outlook handbook. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>.

<sup>3</sup> Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A., & Hwang, Y. (2016, September). Time to Degree: *A National View of the Time Enrolled and Elapsed for Associate and Bachelor's Degree Earners* (Signature Report No. 11). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, page 8.

<sup>4</sup> 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>