

June 17, 2021

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

Dear Representatives Kuster, Upton, Schrier, and Burchett,

On behalf of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), I am writing in support of the *Expanding Access to Graduate Education Act*, introduced on June 17, 2021. For six 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.<sup>1</sup> However, since the program was initially enacted, the needs of our communities and 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 in the American economy.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020). Occupational outlook handbook. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>.

<sup>3</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>

## AFFILIATES

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Midwestern  
Association  
of Graduate Schools

Northeastern  
Association  
of Graduate Schools

Western  
Association  
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2011-2012.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, a significant portion of graduate students—arguably those most in need of financial support—could benefit from utilizing their remaining semesters of Pell. The legislation 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. The proposal stays true to the mission of Pell by providing access to graduate education for economically disadvantaged and historically underserved populations. Enacting the bill 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, the legislation would provide further incentive for more timely completion of an undergraduate degree, a top priority of the Biden Administration, 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.<sup>4</sup>

This legislation is particularly critical as our nation continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent CGS study notes concerns about affordability as a factor preventing some students, particularly from traditionally underserved backgrounds, from accessing graduate education. For example, 82.2% of enrollment management professionals noted lack of financial support as a concern for prospective domestic students since the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The *Expanding Access to Graduate Education Act* has the potential to expand access to graduate education for prospective students from low-income and underrepresented communities, increasing the diversity of our student population and workforce.

Again, we thank you for reintroducing the Expanding Access to Graduate Education Act. 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 Manager of Public Policy and Government Affairs, Matthew Smith, at [msmith@cgs.nche.edu](mailto:msmith@cgs.nche.edu).

Sincerely,



Suzanne T. Ortega  
President

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

<sup>5</sup> Gao, Janet (2021). Data source: NAGAP, The Association for Graduate Enrollment Management & Council of Graduate Schools, Survey of Graduate Enrollment Management Professionals, Fall 2020