

January 25, 2022

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn  
The Honorable Diana Harshbarger  
The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann  
The Honorable Jim Cooper  
The Honorable Mark Green  
The Honorable Steve Cohen

The Honorable Bill Hagerty  
The Honorable Tim Burchett  
The Honorable Scott DesJarlais  
The Honorable John Rose  
The Honorable David Kustoff

Dear Members of Congress,

As leaders of Tennessee's colleges and universities, we understand the transformational power of higher education, particularly for our lower income and first-generation students. Given the recent economic impact of COVID-19 on many students and families, the Pell Grant program is especially critical in ensuring that all students have the opportunity to attend a great college or university, regardless of their financial means. While we are grateful for steps taken to date to increase the maximum Pell Grant more must be done. To this end, we ask for your support in making an affordable, high-quality college education more attainable for students by doubling the maximum Pell Grant award.

An established, means-tested program that enjoys strong bipartisan support, Pell Grants have served as our nation's foundational investment in higher education since their creation nearly 50 years ago. Today, we believe the single most effective way to make higher education more accessible and affordable is by dramatically increasing the maximum Pell Grant award. This long overdue investment will help to drive economic recovery and mobility, address racial and economic inequities in college completion rates, and increase overall educational attainment. Furthermore, by directing federal taxpayer resources toward this proven, means-tested program, we will preserve students' ability to choose the institution that best meets their needs—whether it be a research university, a liberal arts college, an HBCU or a community college.

Pell Grants help nearly 7 million low- and moderate-income students attend and complete college annually. In Tennessee, more than 133,000 postsecondary students, or 41 percent, received a Pell Grant in 2018, equating to nearly \$550 million in awarded funds. Students from each of Tennessee's 95 counties rely on the Pell Grant program to build their futures. Pell Grants are especially critical for students of color and students with family incomes of less than \$50,000. The Pell Grant, arguably more than any other program, carries the power to break the cycle of poverty in the lives of so many Tennesseans.

A common purpose among Tennessee's private colleges is to provide high-quality education to first generation Pell eligible students. Just this past academic year 35 percent of Tennesseans attending a private college or university were eligible for the Pell Grant. Upon graduation, these students continue onto graduate school or enter high- demand career fields in healthcare, business, education, and others. Among the many examples of deserving recipients is an accomplished student who served as valedictorian of their Middle Tennessee high school and can now pursue a degree at Vanderbilt University thanks to a Pell Grant coupled with institutional aid from Opportunity Vanderbilt—an important step toward their

lifelong career goal of business administration.

Pell paved the way for naturalized emigrants from Panama and Mexico to be able to send their three daughters to UT's flagship campus in Knoxville. The eldest majored in physics at UT, graduated in 2015 and then earned her master's degree in electrical engineering in 2018. She now works as an electronics electrical engineer for the Naval Surface Warfare Center. Following her sister's path, the middle daughter graduated with a Bachelor of Science in electrical engineering in 2020 and is now an electrical engineer for Bechtel's Nuclear and Security Division. The youngest works part time for Jacobs Engineering in Oak Ridge, running power simulations on the electrical engineering team. She plans to graduate with her Bachelor of Science in electrical engineering in 2021. Their story is a perfect example of how Pell provides access that helps power our workforce.

A Nashville State Community College student was returning to school after a 10-year break in enrollment. He had struggled in the past as the single father of two children, working two jobs to make ends meet and, as a result, failed to meet Satisfactory Academic Progress standards. After a successful appeal, he became eligible for a Pell Grant which allowed him to return to school to continue working towards the successful completion of his degree. Without the Pell Grant program, he would have been unable to attend school. Now, he expects to graduate with his associate degree in May 2022 and plans to open his own business.

We urge your support for doubling the maximum Pell Grant and permanently indexing the grant to inflation to ensure that its value will no longer diminish over time. These actions would not only honor the history and value of this program as the keystone federal investment in college affordability, but they also would help more students attend college, earn degrees and secure brighter futures for their families and themselves. As we look toward the next chapter for our region and our state, there is nothing more important. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

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Vanderbilt University

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