

June 6, 2025

The Honorable Bill Cassidy Chairman

The Honorable Bernie Sanders Ranking Member

Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions U.S. Senate Washington, DC 20510

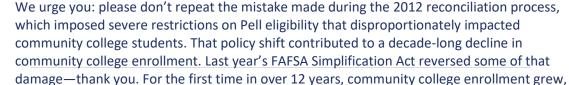
Dear Chairman Cassidy and Ranking Member Sanders,

We write on behalf of the members of Phi Theta Kappa, the nation's official honor society for community college students. Our organization represents more than 4.4 million alumni and nearly 220,000 actively enrolled students in over 1,000 community colleges in the United States.

We are deeply concerned about the impact the proposed reconciliation and recent proposed changes to Pell for FY 26 will have on the lives of millions of current and future community college students. The proposed changes to the Pell Grant program would limit access to higher education and disproportionately harm part-time students, who make up the majority of the community college population.

The most concerning provisions include:

- Eliminating Pell Grants for students enrolled in fewer than 7.5 credit hours This
 would disqualify many students taking just two courses, despite their serious
 academic intent.
- Reducing Pell awards for students enrolled in 12–14 credit hours Even though
 these students are considered full-time, the proposed changes would cut their
 grants by an estimated 20%, particularly affecting those currently receiving the
 maximum award.
- Reducing the maximum Pell Grant award by 23%, nearly \$1,700, for the 2026-27 award year.



largely due to expanded Pell eligibility. Why reverse this good work?





If enacted, these proposed changes would reverse that progress and cause lasting harm to the nation's future workforce. Many high-achieving students at community colleges can only attend part-time—not by choice, but by necessity. Why?

- Most work part-time or full-time, often in low-wage jobs—if they didn't, they wouldn't qualify for Pell.
- Many are parents juggling caregiving and coursework.
- Others care for siblings or elderly family members, enabling their households to survive.

Almost 45% of Phi Theta Kappa members receive Pell grants, and we estimate that 23% of them would be directly affected by these proposed changes. These are honor students. They are not failing college—public policy is failing them.

The current approach to financial aid—favoring full-time, traditional students—is outdated and disconnected from today's student realities. If we are serious about creating a skilled workforce, then we must create policies that reflect the real lives of students. We ask you to reject these harmful provisions and protect Pell for all who need it—regardless of how many credit hours they can take.

Sincerely,

Lynn Tincher-Ladner, Ph.D.

Ja-TRETO

President & CEO

