



PHI THETA KAPPA
HONOR SOCIETY

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.

We urge you: please don't repeat the mistake made during the 2012 reconciliation process, which imposed severe restrictions on Pell eligibility that disproportionately impacted community college students. That policy shift contributed to a decade-long decline in community college enrollment. Last year's FAFSA Simplification Act reversed some of that damage—thank you. For the first time in over 12 years, community college enrollment grew, largely due to expanded Pell eligibility. Why reverse this good work?





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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.

President & CEO

