



National
College
Access
Network

Building Connections. Advancing Equity. Promoting Success.

October 24, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Labor-H Approp. Subcom.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Labor-H Approp. Subcom.
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Labor-H Approp. Subcom.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Labor-H Approp. Subcom.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

The National College Access Network writes on behalf of our over 350 member organizations in 47 states to urge you to protect the long-term health of the Pell Grant program as you finalize the FY 2017 appropriations for the U.S. Department of Education. A number of investments are urgently needed in the program, including re-examining the role of the inflation adjustment, moving toward mandatory funding, and most crucially – one that was recently agreed to by the Senate Appropriations Committee, reestablishing year-round access to Pell Grants, which could help approximately one million students complete college faster. Any allocation of net positive funds in the Pell Grant program toward other priorities will make these key improvements more difficult while setting a precedent for the future that does not prioritize students.

Pell Grants are the nation's most important investment in higher education, and the program is still recovering from reductions made as recently as 2012. Pell Grants provide access to college for millions of low-income students who might not otherwise attend, serving nearly eight million students- most from families making \$40,000 or less. Nearly all of the almost two million students served annually by NCAN members receive Pell Grants as a vital part of their higher education funding. The maximum grant now covers less than 30 percent of the cost of attending a four-year public college, the lowest share in more than 40 years. And Pell Grant students are now more than twice as likely to have loans as other students. Maintaining the impact of the Pell Grant program is paramount for our students, particularly as we counsel them to make responsible decisions about student loans.

As you make decisions on funding levels in the remainder of the FY 2017 appropriations calendar, we urge you to examine the long-term health of the Pell Grant program and its needs when making your decisions.

Sincerely,

National College Access Network

CC: Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees