

March 19, 2026

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Leader Thune, Leader Schumer, Speaker Johnson, and Leader Jeffries:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to share our deep concern about the recently announced shortfall in funding for the federal Pell Grant program, a cornerstone of higher education affordability for millions of low- and moderate-income students nationwide. [Recent projections](#) from the Congressional Budget Office show the Pell Grant program faces a significant budget gap—with an estimated \$5.45 billion gap for fiscal year (FY) 2026 and an \$11.5 billion gap projected for FY 2027. This \$16.95 billion shortfall represents a looming threat to students' ability to attend and afford higher education if not addressed promptly.

Congress should act immediately to provide new funding that fully covers the current and projected Pell Grant shortfall for the current and upcoming fiscal year to prevent any loss in student eligibility or aid, without cutting funding for any other education programs. We also hope Congress will secure the largest possible allocation for the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS-ED) bill. The Pell program is meant to provide predictable, targeted assistance to students with high financial need. It helps more than seven million students each year, and there is [clear evidence](#) that it increases enrollment and completion among low- and moderate-income students. Students make enrollment and borrowing decisions based on the expectation that the federal government will honor that commitment. Addressing the shortfall now will protect students from sudden award reductions and possible severe delays or disruptions of their educational experiences.

Notable expansions of the Pell Grant program demonstrate that strengthening Pell has bipartisan support. Over the past five years, lawmakers from both parties supported, and President Trump signed into law, provisions that have increased the maximum award and overall number of recipients for the grant, expanded eligibility for students who are incarcerated, and established Workforce Pell for short-term, high-quality training programs. These changes reflect a shared understanding that Pell Grants are a vital education policy tool that helps several different student populations gain essential skills and knowledge. The same bipartisan spirit that enabled those expansions should guide action to stabilize the program's finances today.

However, the recurring threat of funding shortfalls highlights a structural weakness in how Pell is financed. Because the program relies predominantly on annual discretionary appropriations, it remains vulnerable to budgetary fluctuations and shifting fiscal priorities. Moving the Pell Grant program to mandatory funding would provide long-term stability, ensure awards keep pace with eligible student demand, and prevent future crises that require emergency fixes. Establishing a sustainable financing structure would protect students and give institutions the certainty they need to plan on behalf of their students, staff, and communities. As indicated above, we believe the immediate focus must be on fixing the shortfall, but we also believe that, after the shortfall is addressed, future Congresses should consider this course of action.

For generations, the Pell Grant has opened the doors of higher education to students who might otherwise be left behind. It ensures higher education remains a pathway toward upward economic mobility for students from all backgrounds: workers with a bachelor’s degree earn an estimated \$1.2 million more over their lifetimes than those with a high school diploma, an earnings premium of [75 percent](#). By acting to protect Pell, Congress can reaffirm its commitment to educational opportunity, economic mobility, and a stronger American workforce. **We respectfully urge you to fill the current shortfall immediately and strengthen long-term funding for Pell so that it remains on stable footing for years to come.**

Sincerely,

10,000 Degrees

AACTE (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education)

Achieve Atlanta

ACTION Ohio (Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now)

AFT: Education, Healthcare, Public Services

Alabama Possible

Alray Scholars Program

America Forward

American Association of University Professors

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

Better Future Foundation

Cal State Student Association

Center for American Progress

Center for Higher Education Policy and Practice at SNHU

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

College Housing Northwest

Congressional Research Institute for Social Work Policy

EdTrust

Education Forward Arizona

Education to Employment Partners

Excelencia in Education

First Generation College Bound

Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network

Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN)

Hildreth Institute

Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison

Institute for Higher Education Policy

KIPP Foundation

Latino Education Advancement Foundation

LeadMN

Missouri College and Career Attainment Network

More Than Bootstraps

NAACP

NAACP Youth and College Division

NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

National Association for College Admission Counseling

National Association of Social Workers

National College Attainment Network
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)
National Education Association
National Resource Consortium on Foster Alumni in Higher Education
New America Higher Education Program
New Jersey Citizen Action
New Mexico Basic Needs Consortium
Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB)
Project Rebound at California State University, Chico
Robin Hood
SchoolHouse Connection
Student Veterans of America
Students United
The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs
The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)
The Real Cost of Prisons Project
Third Way
Today's Students Coalition
uAspire
UnidosUS
United Way of King County
University of California Student Association (UCSA)
URI Feinstein Center for a Hunger Free America
US Student Association
USC McMorrow Neighborhood Academic Initiative
Vera Institute of Justice
Washington Student Association (WSA)
Young Invincibles
Youth Law Center

cc:

The Honorable Susan Collins, Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Patty Murray, Vice Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Bill Cassidy, M.D., Chair, Senate HELP Committee
The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Ranking Member, Senate HELP Committee
The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair, House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Tim Walberg, Chair, House Committee on Education and Workforce
The Honorable Bobby Scott, Ranking Member, House Committee on Education and Workforce
Members of Congress