

November 12, 2020

Dear Senators Murray and Alexander and Representatives Scott and Foxx,

As leaders of chambers of commerce and business associations, we place enormous value on policies that strengthen both our communities and our economies. That's why we're urging you to support lifting the federal ban on Pell grants for people in prison. We believe that lifting this ineffective and harmful ban is a sound investment in our future.

Access to postsecondary education in prison transforms lives and produces positive benefits that ripple across our communities. Over the next decade, there will be, on average, [nearly 5 million job openings each year](#) for which the entry-level educational requirements will range from some college to a bachelor's degree. These are job openings we currently have in our regional industries and small businesses. Better equipping incarcerated people to enter the job market with postsecondary credentials and training will provide employers, like the business owners of our local chambers, with a larger pool of skilled workers from which to hire.

Another benefit of better preparing people in prison to secure well-paying jobs upon release is that as employment rates rise, the combined earnings among all formerly incarcerated people would increase by \$45.3 million during the first year of release alone. In fact, [the Vera Institute of Justice](#) and the [Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality](#) found that [removing the federal ban on Pell Grants for people in prison would increase employment rates among formerly incarcerated students by 10 percent, on average](#). Higher earnings strengthen families and allow people to participate more fully in their communities; resulting in a boost to our local, state, and national economies.

Finally, broadly expanding access to postsecondary education in prison improves public safety. About 95 percent of people in prison will eventually [be released](#). When incarcerated people are able to gain the education and skills necessary to secure employment, they are about 48 percent less likely to return to prison than people who do not. This also keeps families together, and positively disrupts cycles of poverty and involvement in the criminal justice system.

To adequately advocate on behalf of the business owners in our towns and cities across the country, we must work to develop future leaders and keep our communities strong. As formerly incarcerated people return home, it's important – for themselves, their families, and our communities – that they can secure a decent job. And it's important for our businesses that we have a robust pool of educated people to hire from.

That's why we support lifting the ban on Pell for all people in prison. As leaders in Congress, we hope you join us in supporting this sound investment in America's future. Expanding access to postsecondary education in prison by lifting the Pell ban will produce better outcomes for our businesses and our communities. We thank you in advance for your leadership in moving this issue forward.

Sincerely,

Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama (AL)
Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce (AR)
Arkansas State Chamber (AR)
Florence Chamber (AZ)
Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce (CO)

Georgia Chamber (GA)
Chamber of Commerce Hawaii (HI)
Greater Des Moines Partnership (IA)
Greater Kansas City Chamber (KS, MO)
Greater New Orleans Chamber of Commerce (LA)
The New England Council (MA)
Greater Baltimore Committee (MD)
Detroit Regional Chamber (MI)
Minneapolis Regional Chamber (MN)
North Carolina Chamber (NC)
Greater Omaha Chamber (NE)
New Jersey Business and Industry Association (NJ)
Ohio Chamber of Commerce (OH)
Greater Oklahoma City Chamber (OK)
Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce (SC)
Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce (TN)
Austin Chamber (TX)
Vermont Chamber of Commerce (VT)
Renton Chamber of Commerce (WA)
Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce (WA)
Envision Greater Fond du Lac (WI)