



Restore Pell Grant Eligibility for Incarcerated Individuals

Second Chance Pell

The United States currently has the highest incarceration rate in the world with more than 2 million people incarcerated in American prisons and jails. Each year, hundreds of thousands of individuals are released from these facilities, many without the necessary education and workforce skills needed to secure employment.

Numerous studies document the costs of incarceration and its social ramifications. There is also growing recognition of the societal benefits of providing postsecondary education to inmates as those who leave with a college credential have lower recidivism rates than those who leave without credentials.

The U.S. Department of Education launched its Second Chance Pell initiative in 2016, using executive authority to waive the Pell Grant eligibility restriction for inmates enrolled in selected institutions of higher education as part of an experimental sites initiative. While final results are not available, nearly 70 colleges, including several community colleges, have been participating, offering educational programs to inmates.

Important bipartisan legislation has been introduced in both the House and the Senate that would reinstate Pell Grant eligibility for state and federal prisoners. Since 1994, state and federal prisoners have been ineligible to receive Pell Grants. These federal need-based grants are designed to help low-income individuals pay for college.

Key talking points about Reinstating Pell Grant Eligibility for Incarcerated Individuals:

- A 2013 RAND Corporation Study found that incarcerated individuals who participated in correctional education programs were 43% less likely to return to prison within 3 years than prisoners who did participate in any correctional education programs.
- RAND also estimated that for every dollar invested in correctional education programs, \$4 to \$5 were saved on 3-year reincarceration costs.
- The 1994 elimination of Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students resulted in a sharp drop in prison education programs offered by community colleges.
- Community colleges support reinstating Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated individuals as included in the Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act of 2019 (S. 1074, H.R. 2168).

For more information, please contact David Baime, senior vice president for government relations and policy analysis, dbaime@aacc.nche.edu.