



Unlock Higher Education is a coalition of stakeholders dedicated to advocating for policy solutions that increase educational access for individuals with criminal convictions.

## AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

The First Step Act is just that – a first step. Providing education opportunities to the 71 million Americans with criminal convictions is an investment in people, not broken systems, that both reduces crime and eliminates taxpayer burden.



### It's Smart.

Higher education leads to higher incomes and more stable employment opportunities, which means criminal justice involved people will be able to more fully contribute. **By 2020, 65% of all jobs in the economy will require post-secondary education.**<sup>1</sup>



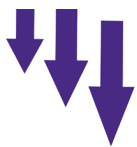
### It's People-Driven.

Access to higher education gives criminal justice involved people a fair chance to care for themselves, which lessens the need for public assistance. **Overall, the unemployment rate for individuals formerly incarcerated is nearly five times higher than the unemployment rate for the general United States population.**<sup>2</sup>



### A Better Use of Resources.

Higher education significantly decreases tax support for an already bloated prison and jail system. **According to the Vera Institute of Justice, incarceration costs an average of more than \$31,000 per inmate, per year, nationwide. In some states, it's as much as \$60,000. However, the cost of one year of college while incarcerated is \$1,400 to \$1,744.**<sup>3</sup>



### Reduces Crime.

Higher education decreases the likelihood that someone will end up back in prison. **Research shows that recidivism rates drop 28% when individuals obtain a bachelor's degree.**<sup>4</sup>

## ELIGIBILITY FOR PELL GRANTS MUST BE UNIVERSAL

Regardless of conviction and sentencing, Pell should be available to everyone. For two decades, incarcerated people serving life without parole were eligible for Pell<sup>5</sup>

Participation in post-secondary education reduces in-facility forms of misconduct which in turn helps correctional officers maintain safety.<sup>6</sup>

Facility culture is often determined by people serving life sentences, many of whom serve as mentors for people in prison, thus if those with life sentences choose to participate all within the faculty will<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES\\_Web\\_.pdf](https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES_Web_.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>

<sup>3</sup>[https://www.bja.gov/Publications/RAND\\_Correctional-Education-Meta-Analysis.pdf](https://www.bja.gov/Publications/RAND_Correctional-Education-Meta-Analysis.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>[https://www.rand.org/pubs/external\\_publications/EP67650.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP67650.html)

<sup>5</sup><http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The-Second-Chance-Pell-Pilot-Program.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>[https://www.urban.org/research/publication/effects-postsecondary-correctional-education/view/full\\_report](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/effects-postsecondary-correctional-education/view/full_report)

<sup>7</sup><https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/criminal-justice/news/2019/04/18/468904/congress-repeal-ban-pell-grants/>

# Legislative Ask

The Unlock Higher Education Coalition is calling on Congress to include these key policies within the Higher Education Re-Authorization Act or other legislation:

**1** Restore Pell Grant eligibility for all incarcerated students regardless of the length of sentence or conviction type. Including incarcerated students in the Pell Grant eligible population will not only give people exiting the system a fair chance at finding a job but will ultimately make communities safer.

**2** Repeal the Aid Elimination Penalty to remove Question 23 from the FAFSA and remove criminal history questions from college admission applications. Removing such questions will decrease barriers to educational opportunities & increase employment rates for individuals with criminal or juvenile justice history.

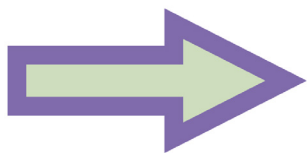
## Common Pell Grant Myths Dispelled

● Providing Pell Funding to ALL incarcerated people does **NOT** take funding away from other students.

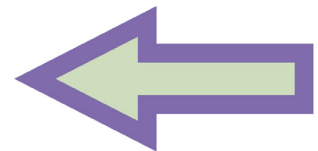
No one outside of prison had been deprived of a grant because someone inside prison received one. If the awards granted exceed the discretionary appropriation, the program borrows on future appropriations to ensure all eligible students receive the award. Despite having the ability to enter into a shortfall, the Pell Grant program has maintained a funding surplus since fiscal year 2012.<sup>1</sup>

● States **CANNOT** handle the problem alone.

States either cannot or do not provide adequate resources to fund robust postsecondary education programs in prisons, and most do not even provide sufficient funding for postsecondary students as a whole. The Hechinger Report found that over 900,000 students in the community were eligible for state financial aid but never received any because state financial aid programs run out of money every year.<sup>2</sup>



Join Our Coalition



Unlock Higher Education is a nationwide network of stakeholders interested in policy solutions to increase educational access for individuals with criminal convictions. We believe that higher education creates pathways to financial stability and increased opportunity. Our primary value is to always keep the voices of those who are formerly incarcerated at the forefront of all the work we do. If you have an interest in joining please contact Stephanie Bazell of College and Community Fellowship, SBazell@collegeandcommunity.org

<sup>1</sup><https://thehill.com/opinion/criminal-justice/437810-restore-pell-grant-eligibility-to-people-in-prison>

<sup>2</sup><https://hechingerreport.org/eligible-for-financial-aid-almost-one-third-of-students-never-get-it/>