

Thank you again for representing Pennsylvania's institutions of higher education. I know you are sorting through a number of competing claims for the higher education dollars in the next budget. I write today to affirm our view—this is the time to prioritize the Pell Grant Program. Pell is the single most effective higher education program in our history—successful at getting students with financial needs to the finish line in college, whether that finish line is community college, 2, 4 year or another post-secondary approach. As we continue to navigate through the pandemic and racing to get back to our new normal, ensuring every student has to opportunity to fulfill their educational goals is the priority--and Pell -- which expanded the GI Bill to all students with need, is the right vehicle. Let me suggest four reasons for this.

First, *Doubling Pell is the most comprehensive approach.* It would immediately make community colleges free for students with financial need and would also make many public state system and other colleges tuition free for the vast majority of recipients. We can achieve that goal--making Community College free--for all students (with any financial need) by simply doubling Pell. Conversely however, you cannot increase the buying power of Pell recipients by making Community College free. In other words, it is possible to achieve both goals if the program that moves forward is the Double Pell agenda.

Second, *Doubling Pell is the most inclusive approach.* Any federal solution that focuses only on free Community College of course excludes all the students who choose to attend any four year institutions, public or private, that best meet their needs and educational goals. Such an approach also by definition excludes Pennsylvania's robust and almost unique independent nonprofit higher education sector (93 schools embedded an average of 134 years in 50 local communities), schools who currently serve:

- *44% of all PA low-income students seeking four year degrees*
- *49% of all PA working-age adult students pursuing bachelor degrees*
- *50% of PA undergraduate minority students attending four-year institutions*

Third, *Doubling Pell solves the timing problem.* By concentrating on increasing funds for the Pell program first--because the program is already established—you will make a faster impact on reducing student debt and increasing college affordability. There is no need to negotiate with 50 states over their portion of free community college funding, no need for state enactment of the program, and no need to create a new bureaucracy to handle those funds—the Pell approach enhances equity simply by its efficiency. None of the increased dollars will need to be spent on creating additional bureaucracy and IT systems to institute the program.

Finally, *Doubling Pell reduces student debt in several immediate ways.* The most obvious is by giving a student more grant money, he or she will not need to take out as many loans. It will also enhance completion rates by retaining the student's ability to choose an educational environment that best fits—rather than one dictated by federal dollars. In Pennsylvania, that means the student can choose from among over 150 institutions, instead of just 14. A better educational fit demonstrably improves not only completion rates, but on time completion

rates—both of which outcomes directly address student debt (the majority of loan default comes from those not finishing).

The real debate should *not* be over whether we do free Community College or Double Pell. The real debate should be whether we adjust the threshold on Pell grants so that more families who are truly needed for college assistance can receive some of that assistance through this landmark program—and then choose from community and other colleges.

Thank you again for your support and we look forward to working with you to support higher education in Pennsylvania.