THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA | THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY | CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES | ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT CALIFORNIA COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

June 23, 2025

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Alex Padilla
United States Senator
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Dean, California Republican Delegation
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Schiff
United States Senator
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chair, California Democratic Delegation
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Thune, Speaker Johnson, Minority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader Jeffries, Senator Padilla, Senator Schiff, Dean Calvert and Chair Lofgren:

Within the provisions contained in HR 1, the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," the federal Pell Grant program faces severe eligibility cuts that would significantly and negatively impact hundreds of thousands of California residents and students. This longstanding and fundamental federal program empowers low-income students to pursue a postsecondary certificate or degree program and serves more than 700,000 California students across California's public higher education

system and its independent, nonprofit colleges and universities. This is a vital and essential program that fuels workforce development, particularly in high-need fields, and powers economic growth for the state and nation.

All segments and sectors of higher education in California are united in their deep concern, and in recognizing the need to "sound the alarm" regarding the widespread, negative impact of these proposed significant cuts to the Pell Grant program. The severe reductions to Pell eligibility in HR 1 and the proposed 23% cut to the maximum Pell Grant award set forth in the President's Fiscal Year 2026 Budget will dramatically impair students' ability to attend college and persist to graduation. This is no overstatement: If adopted, these changes will effectively cripple economic and social mobility – especially considering that 85% of California jobs that pay more than $47,200 for workers aged 25-35 are projected for the next five years to require some postsecondary education.

We call your attention to two policies in HR 1 that would primarily impact those students who juggle responsibilities, such as work and parenting obligations, along with their studies. First, the bill calls for increasing the current full-time credit load required for eligibility to receive the maximum Pell Grant from 24 credits to 30 credits per year. Hundreds of thousands of students would receive at least a 20% reduction in their award under this policy. Second, the bill calls for eliminating the ability to receive Pell Grants if a student attends less than half-time. Under the proposed full-time credit load, that would be equivalent to 15 credits per year.

In addition, the President's Fiscal Year 2026 Budget would set the maximum Pell Grant award back to the level it was 10 years ago. This would cut many students' grants by $1,685 and would negatively impact every single student participating in the Pell program. It does this by flat-funding the program, instead of working to fill the program deficit.

Individually, these policies are severely damaging. Collectively, they represent an existential threat to this vital federal program that serves half of all undergraduate students in California, or 14.3% of all Pell Grant recipients nationwide. Passing these changes into law will have harmful ramifications for our most vulnerable students and for California's economy – the fourth largest in the world – for years to come.

Finally and significantly, we want to recognize and draw your attention to recently released budget reconciliation draft language from Chairman Bill Cassidy of the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. That language provides critically important stability for Pell Grant recipients. The Senate draft would ensure that appropriators would have funding sufficient to maintain the $7,395 maximum Pell Grant award for the 2026 Fiscal Year, and it rejects the large eligibility cuts in HR 1 and the President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

We implore you to reject the cuts to the federal Pell Grant and to work to fill the Fiscal Year 2026 shortfall to sustain this exemplary and trusted program as a reliable source of funding – allowing current and future generations to pursue their educational, professional and personal dreams by earning a life-changing certificate or degree.

Sincerely,

Mildred García, Ed.D.
Chancellor
The California State University

Sonya Christian, Ph.D.
Chancellor
California Community Colleges

Michael V. Drake, M.D.
President
The University of California

Kristen Soares
President
Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities

c: The Honorable Doug LaMalfa (CA-1)
The Honorable Jared Huffman (CA-2)
The Honorable Kevin Kiley (CA-3)
The Honorable Mike Thompson (CA-4)
The Honorable Tom McClintock (CA-5)
The Honorable Ami Bera (CA-6)
The Honorable Doris Matsui (CA-7)
The Honorable John Garamendi (CA-8)
The Honorable Josh Harder (CA-9)
The Honorable Mark DeSaulnier (CA-10)
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi (CA-11)
The Honorable Lateefah Simon (CA-12)
The Honorable Adam Gray (CA-13)
The Honorable Eric Swalwell (CA-14)
The Honorable Kevin Mullin (CA-15)
The Honorable Sam Liccardo (CA-16)
The Honorable Ro Khanna (CA-17)
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The Honorable Raul Ruiz (CA-25)
The Honorable Julia Brownley (CA-26)
The Honorable George T. Whitesides (CA-27)
The Honorable Judy Chu (CA-28)
The Honorable Luz Rivas (CA-29)
The Honorable Laura Friedman (CA-30)
The Honorable Gil Cisneros (CA-31)
The Honorable Brad Sherman (CA-32)
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The Honorable Maxine Waters (CA-43)
The Honorable Nanette Barragán (CA-44)
The Honorable Derek Tran (CA-45)
The Honorable Lou Correa (CA-46)
The Honorable Dave Min (CA-47)
The Honorable Darrell Issa (CA-48)
The Honorable Mike Levin (CA-49)