**Congress Restores Access to Pell Grants for Incarcerated Students Seeking a Second Chance**

**Prison Fellowship Applauds Restoration of Access to Pell Grants for**

**Incarcerated Students Seeking to Become Productive Citizens**

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**Washington, D.C.**— [Prison Fellowship](https://www.prisonfellowship.org/)®, the nation’s largest Christian nonprofit serving prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, applauded the recent actions of the U.S. Congress in restoring access to Pell Grants for incarcerated students as a provision within the Fiscal Year 2021 omnibus package.

“Pell Grant access offers people in prison the opportunity to pursue good citizenship behind and beyond bars,” said [*James Ackerman*](https://www.prisonfellowship.org/about/leadership-board/)*,* ***President and CEO of Prison Fellowship***. “We applaud federal policymakers—and particularly Secretary DeVos, the White House, bipartisan cosponsors of the REAL Act, and higher education leaders like Senators Lamar Alexander and Patty Murray and Representatives Virginia Foxx and Bobby Scott— for moving this historic reform to transform lives, livelihoods, and communities across the finish line.”

“Hope is such a powerful gift,” said [*Heather Rice-Minus*](https://www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/media-information/speaker-bios/), ***Senior Vice President of Advocacy and Church Mobilization for Prison Fellowship***. “Access to Pell Grants has been denied to aspiring incarcerated students for a quarter century. Today’s inclusion of this reform opens a new window of hope that will pay back dividends in the form of safer communities inside and outside corrections facilities for decades to come.”

In the 116th Congress, Prison Fellowship and a wide variety of business, faith-based, civil rights, and conservative organizations, [working with Democratic and Republican lawmakers](https://about.bgov.com/news/prison-pell-grants-get-support-from-big-business-prosecutors/), pressed for a full lift of the Pell ban for incarcerated students in order for such transformative opportunities to expand.

**Background**

* An amendment to the 1994 Crime Bill made incarcerated students ineligible for Pell Grants, which led to an abrupt, dramatic decline of post-secondary education offerings in American prisons.
* The Department of Education’s Second Chance Experimental Sites offer a limited number of incarcerated students with access to Pell Grants. Since 2016, the initiative, which was recently expanded under the leadership of Secretary Betsy DeVos, has provided higher education opportunities to over 16,989 incarcerated men and women.
* Over the course of the 116th Congress, Prison Fellowship, National District Attorneys Association, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Correctional Leaders Association, and other partners advocated for Pell restoration for incarcerated students. More than 60 Democratic and Republican lawmakers supported [bipartisan](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2168/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22REAL+Act%22%5D%7D&r=2&s=1), [bicameral](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1074) legislation to advance this criminal justice reform. In October 2019, Prison Fellowship [hosted 80 faith leaders for a Day of Action](https://www.prisonfellowship.org/2019/10/equipping-pastors-to-restore/) on Capitol Hill where they spoke with their representatives on the issue. Earlier that fall, Prison Fellowship [had the opportunity to visit](https://www.aei.org/society-and-culture/the-faith-factor-in-prison-education/) a correctional education program in Westville, Indiana, with Senator Mike Braun (R-IN) and Secretary Betsy DeVos.
* Research shows that higher education in prison is a [proven tool](https://www.prisonfellowship.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/PellforIncarceratedStudents_MythBusters_Nov18_v10.pdf) for [improving public safety](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE300/PE342/RAND_PE342.pdf), [workforce development](https://www.uschamber.com/letters-congress/us-chamber-letter-hr-4674-the-college-affordability-act), and [reducing racial disparities](https://www.vera.org/blog/racial-disparities-in-mental-health-and-criminal-justice) in the criminal justice system. Restoration of Pell grant eligibility would allow these offerings to expand significantly through new federal funding.

**Prison Fellowship**Prison Fellowship is the nation's largest outreach to prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, and a leading voice for criminal justice reform.  With more than 40 years of experience helping restore men and women behind bars, Prison Fellowship advocates for federal and state criminal justice reforms that transform those responsible for crime, validate victims, and encourage communities to play a role in creating a safe, redemptive, and just society.

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