



August 25, 2021

Dear Senators Bennet and Hickenlooper and Representatives DeGette, Neguse, Boebert, Buck, Lamborn, Crow and Perlmutter:

On behalf of Colorado's institutions of higher education, we write to thank you for your support for Colorado students and their families. Our institutions are committed to providing a quality post-secondary education that is affordable and accessible to every student in the state. We appreciate your support for federal policies and investments that increase college access, affordability, and student success across higher education institutions. We are pleased Congress is considering these issues as part of its annual budgeting work in addition to economic recovery legislation. On average, college graduates will earn \$1 million more over their lifetimes, experience lower unemployment, and benefit from better health. Any successful plan to rebuild our economy and equitably grow our nation's prosperity must broaden the reach of a postsecondary education for new and returning students. With this in mind, we write to you today to urge your support for doubling the maximum Pell Grant, which would quickly and effectively bring an affordable, high-quality college education within reach of all Colorado students.

The Pell Grant is the nation's foundational investment in higher education. Originally called Basic Education Opportunity Grants, the program was later renamed after its original sponsor Senator Claiborne Pell and was created to provide student assistance grants based on need directly to low- and moderate-income students to help pay for college at the school or training program of their choice. Pell Grants are well targeted to students with highest financial need. Nearly 90 percent of all Pell dollars go to students with a family income below \$50,000 and the grants are especially critical for students of color. For 40 percent of undergraduates nationwide, a Pell Grant is the difference between being able to afford college or not. Now more than ever, Pell Grants are vital for low-income and first-generation students, whose families have been especially hard hit by job losses, decreased pay and other financial hardship due to the pandemic.

Pell Grants help nearly seven million students attend and complete college annually. This includes over 77,000 students in Colorado last year. Pell Grants help students at all types of institutions of higher education, including community colleges; four-year public colleges; two- and four-year private, nonprofit colleges; and two- and four-year private, for-profit colleges. The grants help students across the Centennial State – from Durango to Fort Collins to Lamar and everywhere in between – attend college, earn a degree, get a good-paying job, and contribute to their communities as the next generation of teachers, nurses, engineers, doctors, and more.

Unfortunately, the purchasing power of the Pell Grant is at an all-time low. When the program was created in 1972 it covered more than three-quarters of the cost of attending a four-year public college. It now covers less than one-third of those costs in large part due to state disinvestment in higher

education. Doubling the maximum Pell Grant award from \$6,495 to \$13,000, will help close the growing gap between the cost of attending college and the grant's buying power.

Congress is currently considering proposals to increase the maximum Pell Grant by \$1,875 for the 2022-2023 academic year. While this is a meaningful investment, it does not go far enough fast enough to meet the needs of Colorado's Pell-eligible students, which is why we urge you to work with your congressional colleagues to double the maximum Pell Grant now. We also urge you to support policies that automatically adjust the award to inflation – so that its buying power is preserved – and expand grant eligibility, including for undocumented students who study on our campuses.

We believe all Americans, regardless of income, should be afforded the opportunity to access and complete college. Doubling the Pell Grant will ease student loan burden, help students meet basic needs and expand financial aid to more students. Reinvesting in Pell will enable our institutions to stretch our own internal funding for grants and scholarships to more Colorado students and families. Pell Grants are the fairest and most efficient way to help low-income and first-generation students earn a quality education at the school of their choosing. Now is the time to invest in students, families and our nation's long-term prosperity.

Thank you for working with our institutions as you serve the people of Colorado. We appreciate your leadership in Congress and consideration of our views. Please do not hesitate to reach out for additional information.

Sincerely,

Nancy Chisholm, Interim President, *Western Colorado University*
Charles G. Lief, President, *Naropa University*
Leah L. Bornstein, President & CEO, *Aims Community College*
Tom Stritikus, President, *Fort Lewis College*
Jeremy Haefner, Chancellor, *University of Denver*
Tony Frank, Chancellor, *Colorado State University System*
Joyce McConnell, President, *Colorado State University*
Timothy Mottet, President, *Colorado State University Pueblo*
Pamela Toney, President, *Colorado State University Global*
Janine Davidson, President, *Metropolitan State University of Denver*
Rev. John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J., President, *Regis University*
Randy Johnson, Executive Director, *Emily Griffith Technical College*
Andy Feinstein, President, *University of Northern Colorado*
Carrie Besnette Hauser, President & CEO, *Colorado Mountain College*
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