September 7, 2021

The Honorable Mark DeSaulnier  
U.S. House of Representatives  
503 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington D.C., 20515

The Honorable Michelle Steel  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1113 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington D.C., 20515

The Honorable Mark Takano  
U.S. House of Representatives  
420 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington D.C., 20515

Subject: Support for Doubling the Pell Grant Award

Dear Representatives DeSaulnier, Steel, and Takano:

On behalf of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU), I write to respectfully ask that you support doubling the Pell Grant as the House Education and Labor Committee considers the education funding that is part of the $3.5 trillion House budget framework. The Pell Grant is critical to creating access and educational pathways for underserved students and has been underfunded for too long. Doubling the Pell would be the most effective and efficient way to increase college access and success for all underserved students.

AICCU is the organizational voice for over 80 WASC-accredited, nonprofit higher education institutions in California. As a sector, we enroll over 180,000 graduate students and 200,000 undergraduate students, including over 57,000 Pell Grant recipients. Our students reflect the rich diversity of California, and we are committed to them and their families and need the help of Congress to meet their growing financial needs. Students in our sector are facing significant financial challenges, only exacerbated by the global pandemic, including growing housing and food expenses. Many of our students are first generation and face growing pressure to support their families while they attend college. Students in public colleges and universities face these same challenges.

In California, doubling the Pell will essentially make public community college free in that tuition will be covered as well as living expenses, while still supporting low-income students at four-year colleges—nonprofit and public—who also desperately need additional aid to attend and succeed in college. Doubling the Pell Grant is the single most important thing Congress can do to increase access to college and make it more affordable for low-income students, as it targets the aid to students that truly need it. The Pell Grant, which has always enjoyed strong...
bipartisan support, is a well-known and proven program that is at once cost-effective and an equitable way to support students.

Relying on free community college will track underserved minority students to a two-year program, even if they aspire to attend a four-year institution. We know in California that it takes much longer for students to transfer to a four-year institution. This is unfair and inequitable to them.

President Biden has proposed a Pell Grant increase of $1,875 ($400 of which has already been implemented). We are hearing that there are discussions to lower the increase to only $1,000 and this is not acceptable. If the committee will not double the Pell Grant, it should at least maintain the remaining $1,475 increase in this once-in-a-generation investment.

Thank you for your work on behalf of California. Doubling the maximum Pell Grant will help build the workforce of the future and an educated citizenry that is reflective of the rich diversity in our state and country. I look forward to working with you to address issues of college access, affordability, and success. If you have questions, please contact Tom Vu, AICCU Vice President for Policy (thomas.vu@aiccu.edu.)

Sincerely,

Kristen F. Soares
President