July 7, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member, Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Subject: Support for the Pell Grant Preservation & Expansion Act of 2021

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU), I write to express support for the Pell Grant Preservation & Expansion Act (S.2081), sponsored by Senators Mazie Hirano (HI) and Patty Murray (WA). This significant legislation doubles the maximum Pell Grant award over five years, among other provisions.

AICCU is the organizational voice for over 80 WASC-accredited, nonprofit higher education institutions in California. The independent higher education sector is diverse, ranging from large research institutions to small liberal arts colleges, faith-based institutions to art and design colleges. 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 diversity of California and face the same challenges as their colleagues in the public colleges and universities—equitable access to financial aid and opportunities, college affordability, and the cost of attendance beyond tuition and fees.

The Pell Grant was established nearly 50 years ago. At its peak, the maximum award amount covered three-quarters of the costs to attend a public, four-year institution. However, the award has not kept up with inflation and the rising cost of tuition, so today, it covers less than one-third. While AICCU institutions have kept tuition increases modest, the increasing cost of providing an education has made it more challenging to continue meeting the full extent of a students’ needs. S.2081 has many important provisions:

- Doubling the Pell Grant over five years, from the current $6,495 to $13,000, to restore the purchasing power of the award. Doubling the Pell Grant is the most effective way to make college affordable for students. It is also the most cost-efficient, as it targets the federal government’s investment in those that truly need it: low- to moderate-income students. In some cases—particularly for those attending community colleges—the cost of attendance beyond tuition and fees would be met, to give students the support they need to succeed.

- Making the Pell Grant funding fully mandatory, ensuring that the program is stable during tough economic times—when students need a strong, robust grant the most.
• Expanding eligibility to undocumented/DREAMer students, helping these hardworking students continue their education and allow our country to benefit from their talent and potential.
• Broadening access to the Pell for part-time students, which is critical for adults returning to education and are only able to take a few courses at a time, as they seek to improve their lives and the lives of their family.
• Helping the most low-income of students and families with an additional $1,500 award to ensure that all Americans—no matter their background—have an opportunity to attend a college or university.

As the country recovers from the pandemic, we must take this opportunity to reinvest in students and continue it forward into the future. Doing so will benefit our society and our economy by producing the future leaders and workforce of the country and an educated citizenry.

For these reasons, AICCU supports S.2081 and respectfully requests that the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee supports it as well.

Sincerely,

Kristen F. Soares