



June 17, 2021

California Congressional Delegation  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of Congress:

As a collective group made up of California representatives from higher education segments, advocacy groups, and the California Student Aid Commission, with the shared goal of making higher education affordable for all students in California, we are writing to urge you and your colleagues to support the proposal in President Biden's Discretionary Funding Request for FY 2022 that would **expand Pell Grant eligibility to students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status.**<sup>1</sup> While our goal is to provide *all* undocumented students access to federal financial aid, we recognize this proposal as a critical step in making college affordable for all.

California is home to over 94,000 undocumented students enrolled at our postsecondary education institutions, with about half estimated to have DACA status.<sup>2</sup> California has led the way in providing undocumented students both in-state tuition and state-funded financial aid opportunities so that they too can pursue

<sup>1</sup> Young, Shalanda D. U.S. Office of Management and Budget. "The President's request for fiscal year (FY) 2022." April 9, 2021. Retrieved from: [FY2022-Discretionary-Request.pdf \(whitehouse.gov\)](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FY2022-Discretionary-Request.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, New American Economy. "Undocumented Students in Higher Education – How Many students are in U.S. Colleges and Universities, and Who Are They?" March 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Undocumented-Students-in-Higher-Education-Updated-March-2021.pdf>

a college degree, just like their peers. However, the truth of the matter is that there are still many significant financial aid and college access gaps among the undocumented and DACA student population. An estimated 98,000 undocumented or DACA students graduate from American high schools each year, with 27,000 of those students graduating in California.<sup>3</sup> Unlike their classmates, however, this moment of achievement for undocumented and DACA students is muted by the fact that their path to higher education remains difficult at best.

A major barrier for undocumented students (with or without DACA) is the lack of access to federal financial aid such as work-study programs, federal student loans, and the Pell Grant, which provides up to \$6,495 per year in student aid. Despite having the same financial need, if not more, and the same academic tenacity as that of their peers, undocumented students and DACA recipients are currently barred from accessing federal financial aid, which constitutes a critical part of a financial aid package. This proposal, if enacted, would positively impact the educational outcomes of all DACA students across the country by granting them the opportunity to pursue and continue a college education with the same access to financial aid opportunities as their peers.

Each year over seven million low-income students receive a Pell Grant award, thus making college more affordable for grant recipients.<sup>4</sup> Armed with additional aid from the Pell Grant, recipients are afforded the opportunity to work less and spend more time on their studies, enroll in college in higher numbers, stay in school, and achieve improved student outcomes. In California, undocumented students in community colleges with access to state financial aid are more likely to persist with their college degree compared to undocumented peers without aid.<sup>5</sup> Based on this evidence, postsecondary education degree completion rates for DACA students would likely also improve if they were granted access to the Pell Grant.

The need for additional aid is a pressing issue which has only intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Undocumented and DACA students were already struggling to cover the costs of food, housing, transportation, and childcare before the health crisis caused by campus closures and high rates of unemployment. Immigrant students are integral members of California's higher education system, economy, and future. Extending the opportunity to DACA recipients to receive federal Pell Grants is a critical step towards a more equitable higher education system that supports students, regardless of their immigration status, by making college more affordable. For these reasons we urge you to **SUPPORT** President Biden's 2022 Discretionary Budget Request that would extend Pell Grant eligibility to DACA recipients. If you have any questions, please contact the California Student Aid Commission's Director of Government and External Relations, Jake Brymner at [Jake.Brymner@csac.ca.gov](mailto:Jake.Brymner@csac.ca.gov).

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<sup>3</sup> Zong, Jie & Batalova, Jeanne. Migration Policy Institute. "How many unauthorized immigrants graduate from U.S. high schools annually?" April 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/unauthorized-immigrants-graduate-us-high-schools>

<sup>4</sup> The Urban Institute. "Federal Grant Aid." Retrieved from: <http://collegeaffordability.urban.org/financial-aid/federal/>

<sup>5</sup> Ngo, Frederick & Astudillo, Samantha. "California DREAM: The Impact of Financial Aid for Undocumented Community College Students." Educational Researcher 48, no. 1 (January 2019) Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X18800047>.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities  
California Community College Chancellor's Office  
California State Student Association  
California Student Aid Commission  
California Undocumented Higher Education Coalition  
Californians Together  
Central American Resource Center-Los Angeles (CARECEN-LA)  
Council of Mexican Federations  
Foundation for California Community Colleges  
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities  
Immigrants Rising  
Independent California Colleges Advocate Program  
Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation & Kid City Hope Place  
Southern California College Access Network  
Student Senate for California Community Colleges  
Students Making A Change  
The Campaign for College Opportunity  
TheDream.US  
The Dreamer Fund  
The Institute for College Access & Success  
UNITE-LA  
University of California Immigrant Legal Services Center  
University of California Student Association  
Young Invincibles

CC: Governor Gavin Newsom  
Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis  
Senator Toni G. Atkins, President pro Tempore, California State Senate  
Senator Scott Wilk, Minority Leader, California State Senate  
Assemblymember Anthony Rendon, Speaker, California State Assembly  
Assemblymember Marie Waldron, Minority Leader, California State Assembly