

April 20, 2022

Dear Members of the California Congressional Delegation:

Making college affordable for all students in California must be centered and grounded on equal access. As a group of California higher education leaders and the California Student Aid Commission, we are writing to urge you and your colleagues to **include a proposal in the 2023 Fiscal Year (FY) budget that extends Pell Grant eligibility to students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**. Expansion of Pell Grant eligibility to DACA recipients is just as imperative as increasing the Pell Grant's award amount. President Biden's administration has been vocal and consistent with its support to extend Pell Grant access to DACA recipients¹, and we hope that Congress can work with the Biden Administration to include this landmark policy in the FY 2023 appropriations process. While our goal is to provide all undocumented students access to federal financial aid, we recognize this proposal as a critical first step.

The cause of extending Pell Grants to DACA students is particularly important to California. Our state is home to approximately 94,000 undocumented students enrolled in California colleges and universities, with more than half estimated to have DACA status.² California has led the way in providing DACA recipients and other undocumented students with both in-state tuition and state-funded financial aid so that they too can pursue a college degree, just like their peers. However, the reality is that there are still many significant financial aid and college access gaps that the undocumented and DACA student population face. An estimated 98,000 undocumented or DACA students graduate from American high schools each year, with 27,000 of those students graduating in California.³ Unlike their classmates, however, this moment of great 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 now provides up to \$6,895 per year in student aid. Despite having the same financial need, if not more, and the same academic tenacity as 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. Expanding Pell Grant eligibility to DACA students is an opportunity to positively impact the educational opportunities and outcomes of DACA students across the country by granting them the opportunity to pursue and continue a college education with the same level of access to financial aid opportunities as their peers.

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

² 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>

³ 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>

Each year over seven million low-income students receive a Pell Grant award, making college more affordable for grant recipients.⁴ Armed with additional aid from the Pell Grant, recipients are afforded the opportunity to work less and dedicate more time to 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.⁵ This evidence tells us that postsecondary education degree completion rates for DACA students will further improve if they are given access to the Pell Grant.

The need for additional financial aid is a pressing issue which has only intensified due to the economic volatility of 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 first 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 work with President Biden's Administration to ensure that **the 2023 Fiscal Year (FY) budget expands Pell Grant eligibility to DACA students.** If you have any questions, please contact Daniela.Rodriguez@csac.ca.gov. Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Los Angeles
Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities
Cal State Student Association (CSSA)
California Student Aid Commission
California Undocumented Higher Education Coalition
Californians Together
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Council of Mexican Federations in North America (COFEM)
HACU (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities)
Immigrants Rising, a project of Community Initiatives
Southern California College Access Network
Student Senate for California Community Colleges
Students Making a Change
The Campaign for College Opportunity
TheDream.US
The Institute for College Access & Success
Undocumented Student Program | University of California, Berkeley
UNITE-LA

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

⁵ 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>.

University of California Student Association (UCSA)
Young Invincibles

cc: Senator Patty Murray, Chair, Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Committee
Representative Bobby Scott, Chair, House Education & Labor Committee
Undersecretary James Kvaal, U.S. Department of Education