

## Restoring Access to Pell Grants

### CHALLENGE

#### The federal ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals creates barriers to education and post-release employment.

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 banned the Federal government from providing Pell Grants, which provide financial aid to low-income students, to incarcerated individuals. A ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals limits the educational opportunities and future employment prospects of the roughly 460,000 Americans in state and federal prison<sup>1</sup> who would otherwise be eligible for the program. One study found that people who engaged in education programs in prison were 43 percent less likely to return to prison than those who did not.<sup>2</sup> Formerly incarcerated people are more likely to enter into the criminal justice system with lower educational attainment.<sup>3</sup> Sixty-four percent of incarcerated people are academically eligible to enroll in some form of post-secondary education,<sup>4</sup> which can increase employment rates of formerly incarcerated people by more than 10 percent.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the unemployment rate for the formerly incarcerated is 27 percent<sup>6</sup> compared to a national unemployment rate under four percent.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, reinstating Pell Grant eligibility for people in prison makes good economic sense: one study found that \$1 million spent on incarceration prevents about 350 crimes, while that same investment in prison education prevents more than 600 crimes.<sup>8</sup> States would save more than \$365 million dollars per year in reduced incarceration costs by restoring access to Pell Grants.<sup>9</sup> And finally, reinstating Pell Grants would result in a \$45.3 million increase in the combined earnings of formerly incarcerated workers in the year following release.<sup>10</sup>

### SOLUTIONS

#### Restoring Pell Grant eligibility in prison will enhance public safety and benefit the economy.

In 2015, The U.S. Department of Education established the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative, which provides training and educational programming for incarcerated individuals through partnerships with 64 colleges. JPMorgan Chase supports restoring Pell Grant eligibility to incarcerated individuals through reauthorization of the Higher Education Act or through other vehicles that will help ensure all Americans, particularly those who are most at-risk, have access to critical education programs. JPMorgan Chase supports the bipartisan REAL Act, which would repeal the ban. A diverse set of stakeholders has endorsed the legislation, including business groups such as the Business Roundtable and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Prosecutors have also supported Pell Grant restoration and have emphasized the link between education attainment, reduced crime, and better public safety overall.<sup>11</sup> Lifting the ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals would remove a significant barrier to educational opportunity for this population, as well as produce significant economic benefits and strengthen families and communities across the country.<sup>12</sup>

43%

reduction in recidivism for incarcerated students who had access to education

64%

percentage of incarcerated people eligible to enroll in a postsecondary education program

463k

number of incarcerated people who would be eligible for Pell Grants if the ban were lifted

## NOTES

- 1 Vera Institute of Justice. "Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison." [https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison/legacy\\_downloads/investing-in-futures-factsheet.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison/legacy_downloads/investing-in-futures-factsheet.pdf)
- 2 Rand Corporation. "How Effective is Correctional Education and Where Do We Go from Here?" [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR564.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR564.html)
- 3 Prison Policy Initiative. "Getting Back on Course: Educational Exclusion and Attainment Among Formerly Incarcerated People." <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/education.html>
- 4 National Conference of State Legislatures. "Correction by Degrees: Postsecondary Programs in Prisons." [http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/educ/Postsecondary-Programs-in-Prisons\\_v02.pdf](http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/educ/Postsecondary-Programs-in-Prisons_v02.pdf)
- 5 Rand Corporation. "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults." [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR266.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html)
- 6 Prison Policy Institute. "Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment Among Formerly Incarcerated People." <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>
- 7 Bureau of Labor Statistics. "The Employment Situation." August 2019. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>
- 8 Department of Policy Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles. "Correctional Education as A Crime Control Program." 2015. <https://lincs.ed.gov/professional-development/resource-collections/profile-512>
- 9 Vera Institute of Justice. "Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison." [https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison/legacy\\_downloads/investing-in-futures-factsheet.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison/legacy_downloads/investing-in-futures-factsheet.pdf)
- 10 Vera Institute of Justice. "Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison." [https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison/legacy\\_downloads/investing-in-futures-factsheet.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison/legacy_downloads/investing-in-futures-factsheet.pdf)
- 11 National District Attorneys Association. "Nation's Largest Prosecutor Organization Endorses Pell Grant Restoration for Incarcerated Students." <https://ndaa.org/wp-content/uploads/NDAAPress-Release-on-Pell-Grants-Final.pdf>
- 12 Vera Institute of Justice. "Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison." [https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison/legacy\\_downloads/investing-in-futures-factsheet.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison/legacy_downloads/investing-in-futures-factsheet.pdf)

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