

June 12, 2023

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, we are writing to express our support for **the extension of Pell Grant eligibility to students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the inclusion of this proposal in the 2024 Fiscal Year (FY) appropriations package.** 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 expressed its support to extend Pell Grant access to DACA recipients¹, and we urge Congress to work with the Biden Administration to include this landmark policy in the FY 2024 appropriations process.

The extension of 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.

As reflected in the California Student Aid Commission's latest report, *Renewing the Dream*⁴, 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 \$7,395 in 2023-24 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

¹ U.S. Department of Education. "Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Summary" March 2023. Retrieved from: www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget24/summary/24summary.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/research/undocumented-students-in-higher-education-updated-march-2021/>

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>

⁴ California Student Aid Commission. "Renewing the Dream: Improving Financial Aid and College Affordability for California's Undocumented Students" March 1, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.csac.ca.gov/renewingthedream>

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.

Each year over seven million low-income students receive a Pell Grant award, making college more affordable for grant recipients.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.

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 ensure that **the 2024 Fiscal Year (FY) appropriations package expands Pell Grant eligibility to DACA students**. If you have any questions, please contact Daniela Rodriguez at Daniela.Rodriguez@csac.ca.gov.

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

Sincerely,

Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California (AJSOCAL)
Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU)
Cal State Student Association
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office
California Student Aid Commission
California Undocumented Higher Education Coalition
Campaign for College Opportunity
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas en Norte America (DBA COFEM)
HACU (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities)
Immigrants Rising
Kid City Hope Place
Los Angeles Methodist Urban Foundation

⁵ The Urban Institute. "Federal Grant Aid." Retrieved from: <http://collegeaffordability.urban.org/financial-aid/federal/>

⁶ 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>.

Public Advocates
Southern California College Attainment Network (SoCal CAN)
Student Senate for California Community Colleges
The Dreamer Fund
The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)
uAspire
Undocumented Student Program at UC Berkeley
UnidosUS
UNITE-LA
University of California Immigrant Legal Services Center
University of California Student Association
Young Invincibles

cc: Senator Bernie Sanders, Chair, Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Committee
Representative Virginia Foxx, Chair, House Education & the Workforce
Committee
Undersecretary James Kvaal, U.S. Department of Education