



Expanding Educational Opportunities for Justice-Impacted Communities Act

Congressman David Trone (D-MD)

Background

During the “tough on crime” era, lawmakers adopted policies that restricted the recipients of Federal Pell Grants among incarcerated students and students convicted of drug offenses. Almost half of all postsecondary correctional education programs were shut down, and over 41,000 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) applications lost aid eligibility due to drug-related offenses in the 2003-2004 year. These actions severely limited access to postsecondary education among justice-impacted communities and have done tremendous harm to individuals and society.

The Benefits of Increasing Access to Pell Grants

There are moral and economic imperatives for Congress to act to reverse these short-sighted and damaging policies. We know that by restoring pell eligibility for incarcerated students, we are investing in the transformative power of prison education programs and the moral and economic imperatives for expanding postsecondary opportunities.

Higher education is proven to reduce recidivism and improve the employment of justice-involved individuals, yet only 9 percent complete a postsecondary education program while incarcerated. Data suggests that there are many more incarcerated people who would like to enroll in academic programs - in 2014, 70 percent of incarcerated adults expressed a desire to enroll. Incarcerated students who participate in correctional education programs were found to be 28% less likely to recidivate than non-participants. Repealing the Pell ban would also save states an estimated total of \$365.8 million per year as a result of reduced recidivism rates and lowered reincarceration spending.

About the Legislation

The **Expanding Educational Opportunities for Justice-Impacted Communities Act** repeals the ban on the receipt of Pell Grants by incarcerated individuals and the loss of federal financial aid eligibility for individuals convicted of certain drug offenses.

In addition, the bill requires institutions offering Pell-eligible prison education programs to make information available to prospective students regarding key programmatic aspects, providing a vital source of information to incarcerated students who might have limited resources to access this information.

The **Expanding Educational Opportunities for Justice-Impacted Communities Act** further ensures that academic credits earned by incarcerated students are treated the same as those earned by non-incarcerated students in equivalent programs. It makes sure that program costs are not passed on to incarcerated students or their families, and ensures that incarcerated students are treated equitably and not taken advantage of, which is particularly important given the limited number of postsecondary options available to most incarcerated students.