May 16, 2019

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

We write to urge you to support the inclusion of Pell Grants and the repeal of Section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 in the Dream and Promise Act of 2019, H.R. 6. As college and university presidents and chancellors, we are keenly aware of the importance of Pell Grants and in-state tuition in providing the tools necessary for immigrant students, especially students of color and first generation college students coming from low income households, to successfully obtain a college education. Research supported by the Presidents’ Alliance recently concluded that, every year, nearly 100,000 undocumented immigrant students graduate from high school, many of whom would benefit under expanded access to postsecondary education.  

Pell Grants. Pell Grants represent direct financial assistance for low-income students attending a postsecondary institution. Providing Pell Grant access to conditional permanent resident (CPR) holders will foster a more educated workforce and spur economic growth and expand our nation’s tax base. Research studies consistently demonstrate that postsecondary education can increase economic mobility and improve lives. Over a career, an average high school graduate earns at least $1.4 million; an associate’s degree holder earns at least $1.8 million; and a bachelor’s degree holder earns $2.5 million.  

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) demonstrates that there is both a desire and need for expanded access to Pell Grants among Dreamers. In the DACA context alone, 72 percent of individuals are currently pursuing a bachelor’s degree or higher with recipients stating that because of DACA

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they are “pursu[ing] education opportunities that [they] previously could not.”3
Moreover, limiting access to Pell Grants will likely establish additional barriers to H.R. 6’s stated goal to legalize Dreamers as such restrictions would stunt applicants’ ability to work and generate the financial resources to pay for application fees, legal representation, and other ancillary costs.

Under H.R. 6, CPRs are treated as lawful permanent residents for all purposes but naturalization. Consequently, to be eligible for federal financial assistance, including Pell Grants, the bill merely need not restrict CPR holders from Pell Grant access. We ask that you oppose legislative language that would explicitly exclude Pell Grant eligibility for CPRs. In addition, we ask that you continue to ensure CPRs are treated as lawful permanent residents for all purposes, except naturalization. Therefore, under existing law, CPRs would already be eligible for all forms of federal financial aid, including Pell Grants, without the need for affirmative, enabling language.

**Section 505.** Repeal of Section 505, included in virtually every version of the Dream Act ever introduced, would rescind the section of IIRIRA that restricts the ability of states to offer in-state tuition for undocumented immigrant students based on residency. Repeal of Section 505 would restore the discretion of states and respect their autonomy to establish tailored, state-specific strategies to foster access to higher education. It is our understanding that the repeal of Section 505 was, for procedurally reasons, temporarily removed from H.R. 6. We strongly urge you to ensure that the repeal of Section 505 is restored through the Rules Committee or any other procedural mechanism you deem appropriate.

Importantly, neither the bipartisan Dream Act of 2019 (introduced by Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC)) nor last Congress’ the Recognizing America’s Children Act (cosponsored by over 30 Republicans) restrict access to Pell Grants or fail to rescind Section 505.4 For H.R. 6 to be the forward-leaning, inspiring legislation that fulfills your promise to Dreamers and the immigrant community, it too should allow for access to Pell Grants and repeal Section 505.

Our nonpartisan Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration is now over 430 presidents strong. Together we enroll over four million students across 41 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. We have been deeply heartened by the bipartisan support we have heard expressed for DACA and Dreamers by both Democrats and Republicans in Congress, and especially by the breadth of relief provided to Dreamers in H.R. 6. Now is time to come together and pass this vital legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please contact Jose Magaña-Salgado at jose@presidentsimmigrationalliance.org.

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Sincerely,

Louis Caldera  
Senior Advisor and  
Co-Chair, Steering Committee

Nancy Cantor  
Co-Chair, Steering Committee  
Chancellor  
Rutgers University – Newark

Noelle E. Cockett  
President  
Utah State University

John J. DeGioia  
President  
Georgetown University

Jane Fernandes  
President  
Guilford College

Dorothy J. Leland  
Chancellor  
University of California, Merced

David W. Oxtoby  
Co-Chair, Steering Committee  
President Emeritus  
Pomona College

Eduardo J. Padrón  
President  
Miami Dade College

Timothy P. White  
Chancellor  
California State University

Joseph E. Steinmetz, PhD  
Chancellor  
University of Arkansas

Kent Ingle  
President  
Southeastern University

Alan W. Cramb  
President  
Illinois Institute of Technology
José Luis Cruz
President, Lehman College – CUNY

Elsa M. Núñez
President
Eastern CT State University

Mark Erickson
President
Northampton Community College