

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 23, 2025

Chair Tom Cole
Appropriations Committee
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro
Appropriations Committee
1036 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Chair Robert Aderholt
Subcommittee on Labor, Health,
and Human Service, Education,
and Related Agencies
272 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tom Cole, Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro, Chair Robert Aderholt:

We write in strong opposition to the provision in the Fiscal Year 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Act that attempts to rewrite and erase history by renaming the Workforce Pell Grant.

The Pell Grant is named after its creator, Rhode Island's longest-serving U.S. Senator, Claiborne Pell. Senator Pell was a visionary public servant who believed deeply in the power of education to transform lives. He championed the creation of the Pell Grant over 50 years ago because he saw the barriers that too many Americans faced in accessing higher education, and he believed the federal government had a responsibility to help break down those barriers. His legacy lives on in the millions of students, many of them the first in their families to attend college, whose lives have been shaped by the opportunity that Pell Grants provide.

Whenever Senator Pell was asked about his greatest achievement, he would always respond without hesitation: "Pell Grants." ¹ Senator Pell's grandson, Clay Pell expressed hope that Pell Grant recipients take the time to learn about Senator Pell, who he was, and how those around him inspired him to create the program. He reminds us that knowing the history of the Pell Grant can inspire new generations to strive for great things, just as Senator Pell intended.² At the time of Senator Pell's retirement, the grant had already helped over 54 million low-and middle income Americans access higher education, benefiting approximately 60 percent of Black students and half of Native American and Latino students, extending opportunity across communities and backgrounds³. The Pell Grant represents financial aid, a legacy of public service, compassion, and the belief that education is the key to unlocking human potential.

¹ <https://www.politico.com/story/2009/01/ri-sen-pell-dead-at-90-016985>

² [The Pell Grant started in Rhode Island 50 years ago. Will it outlive the US Department of Education?](#)

³ https://www.nasfaa.org/issue_brief_double_pell

Preserving Senator Pell's name on the program is not just about honoring the past, it is about protecting a future where every student, regardless of background, has the chance to dream big and achieve more. To attempt to erase Senator Pell's name from a program that has uplifted generations and replace it with a President whose record on education is defined by cuts and dismantlement is a profound insult to that legacy.

In stark contrast to Senator Pell's steadfast commitment to education, President Donald Trump's record includes efforts to bypass Congress to unlawfully dismantle the Department of Education, freeze federal education and research funding at institutions, pressure schools to roll back key initiatives, including those focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.⁴

Moreover, President Trump's own venture into education, Trump University, was a failure. It was not a university, it was not accredited,⁵ and it ultimately resulted in a \$25 million settlement to resolve fraud claims brought by thousands of students who were misled by President Trump.⁶ The actions by Trump University raise questions about the appropriateness of associating the Trump name with a federal grant program designed to help working-class Americans achieve their higher education dreams. These grants should remain rooted in the legacy of Senator Pell, whose name symbolizes opportunity, integrity and the belief that education is the cornerstone of a strong democracy.

We respectfully urge the Committee to reject this provision and preserve the dignity and purpose of the Pell Grant program. Let us honor the legacy of a Rhode Island statesman who dedicated his life to lifting people up, not replace his life's work with the name of someone whose actions often worked against those very goals.

We look forward to working with the Committee to preserve Senator Pell's name.

Sincerely,



Gabe Amo
Member



Seth Magaziner
Member

⁴ <https://www.acenet.edu/Policy-Advocacy/Pages/2025-Trump-Administration-Transition.aspx>

⁵ [Trump University Uses Similar Sales Tactics To For-Profit Colleges But Without Degrees : NPR](#)

⁶ [Trump paying \\$25M after judge approves Trump University deal | AP News](#)