

College for All Act of 2023

ACE Position on the Legislation

The College for All Act (S. 1963/H.R. 4117) does not include any Republican co-sponsors at this time, and it is unclear how it would move to final passage in the current divided Congress. We will continue to monitor the legislation and support efforts by Congress to increase funding for existing programs like the Pell Grant, as well as create new programs that will expand access for postsecondary students.

Introduction

In June 2023, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, reintroduced the [College for All Act of 2023](#) (S.1963). Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) also introduced the legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives as [H.R. 4117](#).

- The legislation would create a \$10 billion federal program to match state funding at public institutions of higher education to cover student support programs at under-funded institutions;
- It would raise the authorization level for the Pell Grant program to double the maximum grant to \$14,790. It also makes funding for the program mandatory and expands grant eligibility to individuals with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals status and other Dreamers; recipients of Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) or Temporary Protective Status (TPS);
- It also authorizes funding to triple Federal TRIO Programs and to double the funding for the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP).

Key Provisions

Creates Federal-State Partnership to Eliminate Tuition and Fees

The bill would create a new program at the U.S. Department of Education that would eliminate tuition and required fees for eligible students at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and public institutions of higher education called the “Grant for Tuition-Free Public College.” Through the partnership agreement, the federal government would provide grants of at least 80 percent of tuition and fees, while states and territories would be required to cover the remainder. Under the legislation, in the first year, the federal government would provide 100 percent of the national average tuition and fees of community college and four-year public college tuition to states for each eligible student. Over a five-year period, the federal share decreases as the state share increases to no more than 20 percent.

To maintain this partnership, the state cannot cut funding for higher education institutions in three consecutive years, institutions must not have spent less on instruction than they did in the last three years, and states must require public institutions to provide institutional aid to Pell Grant recipients to cover their net costs, among other things. The state would also be required to submit a plan outlining how it would improve transfer pathways to better align secondary and higher education.

The Secretary of Education could also waive a percentage of the state share and increase the applicable percentage of the federal share. An automatic stabilizer would increase federal funding for the program in the case of triggers for states, such as unemployment.

Once tuition and required fees have been eliminated at state institutions, a state or eligible TCU entity can then use any remaining grant funds and non-federal share funds to “reduce the cost of attendance and

increase the quality of instruction and student support services at public institutions of higher education in the State or at the Tribal College or University.” These activities can include:

- Providing additional non-loan financial aid to students to help reduce unmet needs;
- Implementing evidence-based reforms or practices to improve the enrollment, retention, transfer, or completion rates or labor market outcomes;
- Expanding academic courses and providing high-quality occupational skills training programs;
- Increasing the number and percentage of tenure or tenure-track faculty;
- Providing all faculty with professional support;
- Compensating part-time faculty for work done outside of the classroom relating to supporting student success;
- Strengthening and ensuring all students have access to student support services;
- Expanding access to dual or concurrent enrollment programs and early college high school programs;
- Establishing prison education programs in partnership with local or State correctional facilities; and
- Carrying out any other additional activities that improve instructional quality and academic outcomes

Creates Grants to Eliminate Tuition and Fees at HBCUs and MSIs

The legislation would also create a new program called “Grants for the Elimination of Tuition and Fees at HBCUs and MSIs.” To qualify for these grants, students must enroll in a private, nonprofit HBCU or MSI, and their family must earn less than \$125,000 a year in a single parent household or \$250,000 a year in a married household.

For each year an institution participates in the grant program, each student at an eligible 2-year institution would be awarded \$4,880, and each student at an eligible 4-year institution would be awarded \$10,200, both would be adjusted for inflation during subsequent years. Participating institutions must:

- Maintain the same level of expenditure on instruction as in the previous three years;
- Not increase tuition at a rate that is greater than the percentage increases over the last five years;
- Maintain articulation agreements with every community college in the state; and
- Continue need-based financial aid programs for students at a level that meets or exceeds the level of such support for the award year 2023–2024.

Federal Pell Grant Improvements

To improve the purchasing power of Pell Grants, the bill would authorize doubling the maximum Pell Grant to \$14,790. The legislation improves the Pell Grant by making it a fully mandatory program and not subject to annual appropriations. It also would expand Pell Grant eligibility to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) students.

Inclusive Student Success Grants

The bill would establish a \$10 billion “Inclusive Student Success Grant” program. The program could be used by states participating in the federal-state partnership (described above) to implement evidence-based practices and strategies to address the equity gap at underfunded institutions. The Secretary would be responsible for tracking national and state progress in improving student outcomes for states that received grants.

Triple Federal TRIO Funding

The legislation would triple the authorization for Federal TRIO Program funding to \$3 billion to serve additional students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and first-generation college students.

Double GEAR UP Programs for Undergraduate Students

The bill would double the authorization of the GEAR UP Program from \$388 million in FY 2023 to \$736 million in FY 2024 to allow additional students from low-income backgrounds to participate.

Increase Mandatory Funding for HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs

The bill would increase the funding allocation for HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs from \$255 million to \$510 million for FY 2024 and subsequent fiscal years.