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Senate Spending Bill Increases Pell Grants by \$100, but Also Cuts Pell Funding by \$2.6B

“Today, the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee voted on a bipartisan basis to approve a Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) [spending plan](#) that increases the maximum Pell Grant by \$100 (from \$5,920 to \$6,020) for the 2018-19 year. This 1.7% increase will help offset the loss of the grant’s annual inflation adjustment, which expires this year. TICAS and many others have for months [urged](#) appropriators to do exactly this, including in a [letter](#) sent yesterday by over 70 groups representing students, veterans, colleges, consumers, financial aid administrators, college access professionals, scholarship providers, education advocates, civil rights advocates, workers, and the business community.

“The bipartisan Senate bill also automatically restores Pell Grant eligibility for defrauded students who have their loans discharged, and directs the Department of Education to process expeditiously the tens of thousands of ‘borrower defense’ applications it has already received.

“In providing an increase in the maximum grant and restoring eligibility for defrauded students, Senate appropriators have made an important showing of bipartisan support for Pell even as both the House and the Administration have proposed freezing the grant amount and making much deeper cuts to the program. However, the Senate bill also cuts \$2.6 billion from Pell Grant funding—a cut that would come on top of the \$1.3 billion already taken in FY17. In total, that is \$3.9 billion in cuts to funds intended for students to support college access and affordability.

“The Pell Grant plays a critical role in reducing the already high debt burden for low- and middle income students. [Pell Grant](#) recipients are more than twice as likely to have student loans, and they graduate with much more debt than their higher income peers. Even with the increase proposed in the Senate today, the maximum Pell Grant will still cover the smallest share of the cost of attending a public four-year college in more than 40 years. Any proposal to cut the Pell Grants is out of step with the goal of growing an educated, competitive workforce.

“While we are very disappointed and concerned to see an additional \$2.6 billion cut to Pell Grants in this bill, we praise both Senator Blunt and Senator Murray for committing to work to reduce it through an ultimate Congressional FY18 spending agreement that increases overall discretionary funding levels. We urge the full Senate Appropriations Committee to join them in this commitment when they consider the FY18 LHHS spending bill tomorrow.”

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An independent, nonprofit organization, The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) works to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. Our Project on Student Debt works to increase public understanding of rising student debt and the implications for our families, economy, and society. For more information see www.ticas.org or follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).