

Support the REAL Act and the Beyond the Box for Higher Education Act

People who are incarcerated or who have criminal or juvenile justice records often experience barriers to educational opportunities that harm rehabilitation. Each year, approximately 600,000 people are released from prison and 40% of them return within three years. Expanding access to educational opportunities during and after prison can help significantly improve outcomes, such as enhancing economic security and job prospects, lowering unemployment rates, increasing earning potential, and expanding career paths.

The federal Pell Grant program was established to help make higher education and technical training more accessible for millions of low-income students. However, the 1994 Crime Bill barred most incarcerated students from receiving Pell Grants. As a result, the number of prison education programs has fallen dramatically. Even after release from prison, obstacles to higher education remain. Most colleges and universities ask criminal justice, juvenile justice, and/or school disciplinary questions in their admissions processes. Not only does this have a chilling effect on those who seek to apply, research also shows that rejection rates for those with convictions can be 12-13 percentage points higher than for those without.

Members of Congress should cosponsor and support the inclusion of the REAL Act (S. 1074/H.R. 2168) and the Beyond the Box for Higher Education Act (S. 1338/H.R. 2563) in the Higher Education Reauthorization Act.

- **The REAL Act would restore Pell Grant eligibility to people currently incarcerated in state and federal prisons.** Studies have shown that recidivism rates drop significantly for people who earn a post-secondary degree, which can help justice-involved individuals overcome obstacles, prepare for the workforce, and successfully reintegrate into society. Lifting the ban would save \$365 million per year through reduced incarceration.
- **The Beyond the Box for Higher Education Act would encourage colleges and universities to remove criminal and juvenile justice questions from their admissions applications.** Almost 70% of colleges and universities collect criminal justice information for prospective students, which many schools use to make admissions decisions and which also has a chilling effect on those who seek to apply. Colleges and universities that provide opportunities for the estimated 70 million Americans who have an arrest or conviction record to earn a postsecondary degree or training certificate can help reduce the harmful consequences of justice involvement and contribute to more positive outcomes for individuals, their families, and their communities.

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The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) is the hub of the Jewish community relations network, representing over 125 local Jewish community relations councils and 17 national Jewish agencies. Together our network builds consensus on behalf of the entire Jewish community to promote a just and pluralistic American society, advocate for human rights around the world, and support Israel's quest for peace and security.