



COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

April 6, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**RE: Support for Second Chance Month 2018 and Second Chance Pell**

Dear Senator Alexander,

I am writing on behalf of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) to urge you to support S.Res.440 declaring April 2018 “Second Chance Month” and, in the spirit of this declaration, reinstate Federal Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated individuals. The CCCU represents 182 institutions around the world, including 141 in the United States. Two of our schools were among 67 institutions selected in 2016 to participate in the U.S. Department of Education’s Second Chance Pell Pilot program. Our institutions are affiliated with 35 Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church. Christian colleges pursue faith and intellect for the common good.

Last year, Senator Portman sponsored a resolution to declare April 2017 to be Second Chance Month, a time to honor “the work of communities, governmental entities, nonprofit organizations, congregations, employers, and individuals to remove unnecessary legal and social barriers that prevent an individual with a criminal record from becoming a productive member of society.”<sup>1</sup> The resolution passed in the Senate by unanimous consent. We encourage Congress to recognize Second Chance Month once again, in April 2018, through S.Res.440. We applaud Senator Portman for introducing this resolution for a second year. We further urge Congress to actively participate in Second Chance Month this year, by reinstating Pell eligibility for prisoners and thus removing one of the key barriers they face to higher education.

Education is one of the most important tools for success and stability during re-entry. Approximately 76 percent of the prison population has not had any postsecondary education, and about 41 percent never graduated high school. (Compare that to the national averages of 52 percent and 18 percent respectively.)<sup>2</sup> These individuals need degrees to compete in the job market. A study by the RAND Corporation found that inmates who participated in correctional education programs were 13 percent more likely to find a job upon release than inmates who did not. Once they are out of prison and stably employed, they are much less likely to be rearrested. Prison education students

---

<sup>1</sup> S. Res.129, 115<sup>th</sup> Congress – “A resolution designating April 2017 as ‘Second Chance Month.’”

<sup>2</sup> “Education Opportunities in Prison are Key to Reducing Crime.” Kathleen Bender, *Center for American Progress*. March 2, 2018. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/news/2018/03/02/447321/education-opportunities-prison-key-reducing-crime/>

are 43 percent less likely to recidivate than other inmates who did not receive prison education.<sup>3</sup> These results are worth the investment. In fact, prison education pays for itself. Lower recidivism rates mean less money spent on future arrests, trials, and incarcerations. In 2015 the average annual cost of incarceration per individual was \$31,977.<sup>4</sup> The Center for American Progress reports that “for every dollar spent on prison education, taxpayers are estimated to save four to five dollars that would have been spent on incarceration.” Investing in prison education now saves millions of taxpayer dollars annually and helps individuals bearing the image of God return to good and fruitful lives.

Our faith calls us to care for and fight for the most vulnerable among us, as well as to offer forgiveness. The Christian faith teaches that God through his grace has provided a second chance for all of us. Indeed, even Biblical heroes, like David, Moses, or Paul, once committed or aided in murders—demonstrating the good that can come from changed lives. The individuals in our prison system deserve the same compassion and opportunity.

We support extending Pell Grants to incarcerated men and women, whether through a standalone bill like the Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act (S.2423 and HR.254) or the inclusion of that bill’s provisions in the Higher Education Act reauthorization package. We urge you to celebrate Second Chance Month by extending educational opportunities to some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shirley Hoogstra". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shirley V. Hoogstra  
President  
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities

---

<sup>3</sup> “How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here?” Lois M. Davis, et. all, *RAND Corporation*. 2014.

<sup>4</sup> “Annual Determination of Average Cost of Incarceration.” Prisons Bureau notice in *The Federal Register*. July 19, 2016. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/07/19/2016-17040/annual-determination-of-average-cost-of-incarceration>