

Dear [NAME],

On July 1, 2023, people in prison regained eligibility for Pell Grants—a historic policy change ending the ban set in place by the 1994 Crime Bill. The reinstatement of Pell eligibility means more people in prison will be able to afford college and incarcerated students will have access to a greater variety of postsecondary degrees and credentials. These changes could translate into thousands more people pursuing their degrees on college campuses across the United States, helping to break cycles of poverty and incarceration. These outcomes, however, are reliant on more colleges launching programs in prison and improving supportive services for formerly incarcerated students.

I am writing to urge [SCHOOL] to take the following steps to serve the thousands of people in [STATE] who have been impacted by the criminal legal system and policies that have fueled mass incarceration in the United States:

1. **Launch a program in prison:** The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) estimates that more than 760,000 incarcerated individuals are academically eligible to apply for Pell Grants, meaning that thousands more people in prison will be able to afford college in the years ahead now that they have been reinstated.

[SCHOOL] should reach out to the state corrections department and/or [Vera](#) to learn how [SCHOOL] can serve students in prison. Two-year and four-year colleges are in high demand.

2. **Remove admissions questions about conviction history:** No evidence has established a direct causal link between students with conviction histories and an increase in campus crime rates, but [research](#) does show that application questions about criminal legal system involvement deter formerly incarcerated potential students from applying to college.

[SCHOOL] should follow the [recommendations of the Biden administration](#) and remove questions relating to criminal legal involvement in their admissions process. If this is not possible, [SCHOOL] should take steps to ensure the admissions process is evidence-based, transparent, and fair.

3. **Expand and improve supportive services for formerly incarcerated students:** [Formerly incarcerated students often face significant challenges](#). Some challenges are unique to their interaction with the criminal legal system, while others are also experienced by many first-generation students and students with low incomes.

[SCHOOL] should follow the [recommendations of the Biden administration](#) and create a more welcoming campus for students of diverse backgrounds, including improving food, housing, childcare, mental health, academic, and employment services along with training staff to support the unique needs of formerly incarcerated students.

Expanding access to college in [STATE'S] prisons would have tremendous benefits both for communities statewide and for [SCHOOL'S] own campus community.

[Research](#) shows that access to college in prison improves students' sense of self-worth as well as their employment and earning potential. It also makes correctional facilities safer and reduces the likelihood that someone will return to prison by 48 percent, thus saving taxpayer dollars which can be reallocated toward education and other public services.

Colleges greatly benefit, too. Professors often report that the classes they teach in prison are [some of their most rewarding](#). Partnerships between colleges and departments of correction foster unique learning experiences, enabling students inside and outside prisons to connect with and learn from one another. Admissions officers may also find that programs in prison can create pipelines for enrolling individuals from marginalized communities, meaning many colleges can further fulfill their missions to cultivate diverse student bodies.

[OPTIONAL TEXT ABOUT WHY SCHOOL SHOULD GET INVOLVED IN THIS WORK]

Most people in prison are interested in pursuing postsecondary education while incarcerated. About [two-thirds](#) of people in prison are academically eligible to participate in a college program. The reinstatement of Pell Grant eligibility for people in prison offers colleges a way to reach thousands of eager people who want to get a degree and presents an opportunity to reassess the existing institutional support for system-impacted students.

I urge [SCHOOL] to seize this opportunity and join the national movement of colleges expanding access to degrees behind bars and actively working to end mass incarceration.

Sincerely,

[NAME]