



Friends Committee  
on National Legislation

Lobbying with Quakers

March 2020

Dearest Friends,

“When we allow ourselves to separate ourselves from each other, we’re creating divides. And we’re creating greater brokenness.” –Laura Magnani, American Friends Service Committee

As Quakers, we know that all people have value, even when they’re incarcerated. Our criminal justice system, however, takes a punitive approach, stripping incarcerated people of dignity and opportunity.

A stark example is education—imprisoned individuals are currently ineligible to receive Pell Grants, which provide federal financial aid for low-income college students across the country. This ban denies people a crucial pathway to get an education and, once released, contribute to our society.

As a solution, Congress should pass the Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act (H.R. 2168 /S.1074). The REAL Act would lift the ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated people, make our criminal justice system more redemptive, and help recognize the inherent worth of each person. **As Friends, we call on Congress to pass the REAL Act and restore Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated people.**

**Recently, I interviewed FCNL’s program assistant for criminal justice, Joe D’Antonio.** He said, “education helps to reduce recidivism and lead people to a better life free from the cycles of incarceration.” Watch the full interview at [fcnl.org/qwc](http://fcnl.org/qwc).

Passing the REAL Act in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) would be a vital step towards redemption and success for imprisoned people. The House version of the HEA currently includes the REAL Act, but it precludes certain incarcerated people from receiving Pell Grants. We hope to see a Senate version of this bill in the next 4-6 weeks.

As HEA negotiations progress, your members of Congress need to hear from Friends about how Pell Grants can unlock the potential of incarcerated people. Please act using the accompanying letter template and call script. **Urge your members of Congress to pass the REAL Act (H.R. 2168 /S.1074) in the reauthorization of the HEA and give incarcerated people the same funding for educational opportunities given to everyone else.**

When you write your letter, please add a personal note of 2-4 sentences letting your member know why you are concerned. Then, call the U.S. Congress at 202-224-3121 to be connected to your representative’s and senators’ offices. You can also call their district offices! Leave a message if they do not pick up or if you are calling after office hours.

Ever faithfully onwards,

Bobby Trice  
Program Assistant for Quaker Outreach  
[rtrice@fcnl.org](mailto:rtrice@fcnl.org)

*Call Script*

Hello, I am calling for **Representative/Senator** \_\_\_\_\_. I am a resident in [city, state] in district [number]. I urge you to pass the REAL Act (H.R.2168 /S.1074) in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. This crucial legislation would lift the ban on Pell Grants for all eligible incarcerated people. This Pell Grant ban contributes to a cycle of poverty, recidivism, and mass incarceration. Lifting the ban would create a pathway to success for formerly incarcerated people, resulting in a healthier society and reduced prison costs.

**(My story)**

Please use your vote to make our criminal justice system more restorative and redemptive by giving incarcerated people the same educational opportunities afforded to others.

*Letter Template*

March 2020

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Too often, incarceration is treated as a solution to crime. Opportunity, however, is a much better driver of change in the criminal justice system.

That is why Congress must pass the Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act (H.R.2168 /S.1074). This bill would lift the ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals, thereby giving them a chance to improve their condition through employment and opportunity. This would be a huge boost for our communities, our families, and our society.

**(My story)**

Everyone deserves the opportunity to advance themselves, regardless of whether they are incarcerated. The REAL Act can reduce recidivism, decrease prison costs by \$365 million annually, and rebuild lives. We should do what's right by people, communities, and the incarcerated. Please co-sponsor the REAL Act (H.R.2168 /S.1074) and ensure that it is included in any reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Sincerely,

(Name, Physical Address, Phone, Email)