



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement for the Record
Fiscal Year 2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act
December 16, 2011

I rise today to express my concern over the changes that would be made to the Pell Grant program by this spending bill.

In 2009, my colleagues and I on the House Education and Labor Committee made a landmark investment in the Pell Grant program when we passed the *Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act*. Through that legislation, we increased the maximum Pell Grant award to \$5,550, up from \$4,050 in 2006. As college tuition rises, the higher maximum award has served as a lifeline to students who want to better their future by attending college or a technical or trade school. I am pleased that the bill we are considering today protects that maximum award level.

However, I am disappointed that this spending bill makes several changes to the Pell Grant program that will close the doors to college to many students in Puerto Rico and across our nation. Specifically, the bill would limit the number of semesters during which a student may receive a Pell Grant, require that a student hold a high school diploma or General Equivalency Degree to obtain a Pell Grant, and reduce the income level below which a student will automatically receive the maximum Pell Grant award from \$30,000 to \$23,000.

These changes appear to be premised on the belief that, for a student to benefit from postsecondary education, he or she must take a traditional path—graduate from high school or obtain a GED, and then complete college within a set amount of time. Most, if not all, of us in this body took that path. But today, an increasing number of students are not taking that path, particularly as our economy continues its slow recovery. If we require students to meet our preconceived notions of the type of student who is worthy of a Pell Grant, we will shortchange many of our nation's young people who seek a better life for themselves. Some students are unable to graduate from high school, to receive a GED, or complete college within 12 semesters because they must work to provide for their family. Other students must care for an ill family member. Whatever the reason, if a student is motivated to attend college or a technical or trade school, we should provide the same financial assistance that we provide to students who take a more traditional path.

In today's economy, graduating from college is more important than ever. Fifty years ago, an individual could obtain a well-paying job without a college degree. Today, college opens so many doors for our nation's youth that would otherwise remain sealed shut. We in Congress should do everything in our power to increase access to college and technical and trade schools. I regret that this spending bill falls short on that measure.