

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/restoring-access-to-pell-grants-for-incarcerated-students>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

In December 2020, Congress lifted a 26-year ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated students. The ban, enacted amid a slew of tough-on-crime policies in the 1990s, stripped people in prison of access to this federal financial aid. Incarcerated people earn pennies per hour for the work they do in prison, making it next to impossible for them to afford postsecondary education without financial support. Under the ban, the number of prison education programs shrank drastically, from 772 programs in the early 1990s to only eight in 1997. The FAFSA Simplification Act, which restores access to Pell Grants for people in prison, will make it possible once again for thousands to pursue postsecondary education.

The FAFSA Simplification Act, which restores access to Pell Grants for people in prison, will make it possible for thousands to access higher education, and in turn create opportunities for them to secure well-paying jobs, find stable housing, provide for their families, and reintegrate into their communities when they leave prison.

The law is sentence-blind, meaning that all incarcerated people can apply for Pell Grants, regardless of conviction or sentence length.

The Act creates new evaluation and reporting guidelines for prison education programs to ensure that they are operating in the best interest of students.

Vera is launching the Corrections Education Leadership Academy in Spring 2021, designed to provide support to departments of corrections and education leaders in creating statewide education systems for incarcerated people.

NEWS

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