



STUDENT PEACE ALLIANCE



Lobbying Toolkit for the Get REAL Campaign

Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act of 2015

Updated July 2015

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Background on the REAL Act:

The REAL Act is a piece of legislation that would re-instate Pell Grant eligibility for federal and state incarcerated individuals.

Pell Grants are part of a Title IV program managed by Department of Education. They are intended to help undergraduate students in need of financial support to access institutions of higher education and learning. The maximum amount allotted is \$5,645 per student, and according to the U.S. Department of Education, over 8.6 million students were awarded grants in the 2013-2014 cycle.

Since 1994, incarcerated individuals have not been eligible for Pell Grants as a result of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. This bill significantly limited the availability of higher education opportunities for incarcerated people, reducing prison education programs from 350 in 1994 to 12 in 2005.¹ If Pell Grants were reinstated, not only could more incarcerated individuals participate in current prison education programs, the financial incentives for institutions to start more prison education programs would be substantially increased.

Quick Facts on the REAL Act:

- The REAL Act was introduced by U.S. Representative Donna Edwards (MD-4) on May 21st 2015.
- The Act also has support from Danny K. Davis (IL-7), Barbara Lee (CA-13), Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (VA-3), Rosa L. DeLauro (CT-3), and Cedric L. Richmond (LA-2).¹

Benefits to Reinstating Pell Grant Eligibility:

- Eliminating barriers to higher education goes a long way in reducing recidivism (the rate at which people return to prison after their release) and increasing public safety. The national recidivism rate is 43%; this figure drops dramatically with access to higher education for people impacted by incarceration:
 - Less than 1% for those with Masters Degrees
 - 5.6% with a Baccalaureate’s degree
 - 13.6% with an Associate’s degree



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- Having access to higher education improves one's chances of attaining employment and steady work- keeping people at work and on the path of opportunity.
- Eliminating barriers to higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals prepares those re-entering the community to be able to get a good paying job. Gainful employment ensures that they are able to take care of themselves and their families in turn strengthening the communities they have returned to.
- Ensuring access to higher education to formerly and currently incarcerated individuals will afford them greater opportunities once they are released from prison. This in turn will reduce dependence on public assistance, increase physical and mental health, and provide society with productive tax paying members.²
- For every dollar invested in correctional education programs, two dollars are saved through prevented recidivism. This means that it not only helps previously incarcerated people have a better life, but it saves taxpayers money.
- Studies show that reinstating Pell Grant eligibility for both state and federal prisoners will reduce future crime and save more money in future incarcerations costs than the cost of Pell Grants.¹
- Those released from the justice system who are lacking a high school degree have 44.7% recidivism rate, while those released who were college program participates have a 17.3% recidivism rate.
- Awarding Pell Grant funding to those incarcerated does not take away the availability of funds for other students.³
- Incarcerated individuals who participate in a correctional education program are 13% more likely to have a job after being released.⁴

Debunking Myths about Pell Grant Access:

Awarding Pell Grants to incarcerated people is cost-effective, and beneficial to our economy and our communities.

Allowing incarcerated people to access Pell Grants does not detract from the availability of funds for other students. Anyone who qualifies for a Pell Grant will receive one. In 1993, only one tenth of one percent (.01%) of Pell grants were awarded to incarcerated people, totaling



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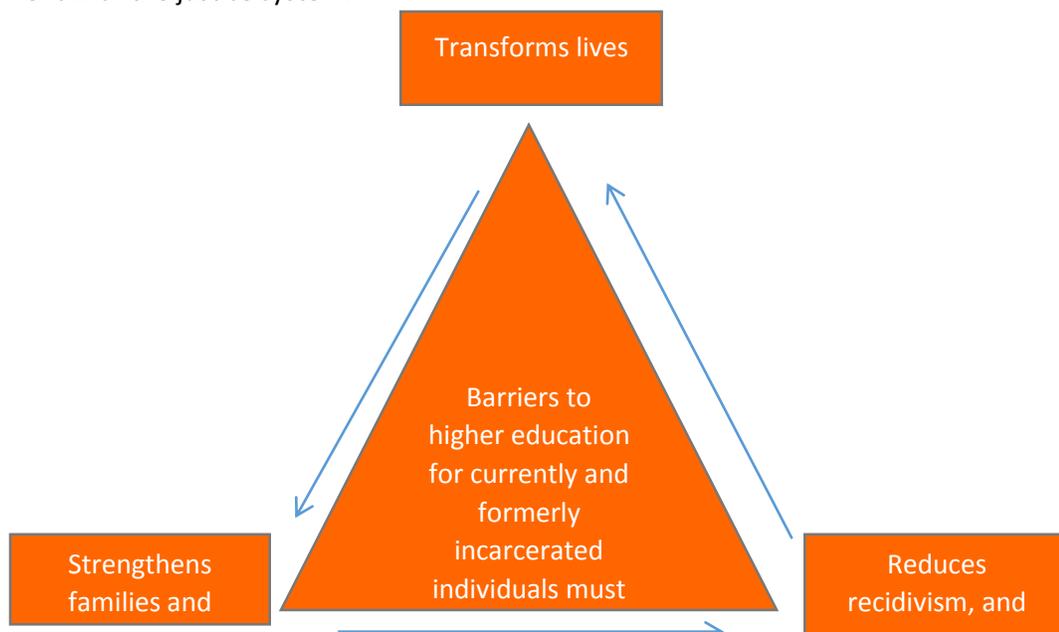
\$34 million of the \$5.3 billion allotted. This represented over 6,000 grants to incarcerated people.⁵

Awarding Pell Grants to incarcerated people is actually more cost effective and beneficial to our economy than incarceration. For example, it costs the state of New York \$60,000 per year to incarcerate someone- which is \$54,000 more than the maximum amount possible for one Pell Grant at \$5,500. Given that education significantly reduces recidivism rates, an investment of one Pell Grant that could prevent someone from returning to prison for even a single year would save taxpayers significant sums.

Access to education would also decrease tax-payer costs and reduce reliance on public assistance as well as public funding for the cost of incarceration. When people returning from prison are able to find employment, they are able to financially contribute to society by paying things like taxes, fines, child support, and restitution without relying on criminal means to access those funds.

Staying on Message⁶:

Throughout the course of our work in our personal capacity, or through our organizations, we have developed our own way of speaking about the issues we care about. Yet, as a coalition it is important that we speak with one voice so that we are delivering our key messages in a consistent manner to stakeholders. This section will help identify our key messages, identify tricky questions and how to answer them, and provide general message guidance when discussing our issues. We hope this guide is helpful in communicating the importance of eliminating barriers to higher education for those who have had involvement with the justice system.





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A message triangle identifies our core message as well as three supporting messages, all of which reinforce each other. Use the message triangle when discussing our issues so that you always have a set of key messages you are delivering. By familiarizing yourself with the message triangle you support the core message of the need to eliminate barriers to higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, and can “jump in” anywhere along the triangle. On the next page you will find more in depth messaging around the support points and an example of the message triangle in action.

“ELEVATOR PITCH”: The REAL Act works to remove barriers to higher education for incarcerated individuals. Access to higher education transforms lives, reduces recidivism increasing public safety, and strengthens families and communities.

CORE MESSAGE: Barriers to higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals must be removed.

SUPPORTING MESSAGE 1: Transforms lives

There is no doubt that access to higher education is transformative. Ensuring access to higher education to formerly and currently incarcerated individuals will afford them greater opportunities once they are released from prison. This in turn will reduce dependence on public assistance, increase physical and mental health, and provide society with productive tax paying members.

SUPPORTING MESSAGE 2: Reduces recidivism and increases public safety

Eliminating barriers to higher education goes a long way in reducing recidivism and increasing public safety. The national recidivism rate is 43%; this figure drops dramatically with access to higher education: Less than 1% for those with Masters Degrees, 5.6% with a Baccalaureate’s degree and 13.6% with an Associate’s degree. Having access to higher education improves one’s chances of attaining gainful employment – keeping people at work and on the path of opportunity.

SUPPORTING MESSAGE 3: Strengthens families and communities

In order to compete in today’s economy it is almost pre-requisite to have a college degree. Eliminating barriers to higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals prepares those re-entering the community to be able to get a good paying job. Gainful employment ensures that they are able to take care of themselves and their families in turn strengthening the communities they have returned to. Access to higher education is more than just a degree; it has a ripple effect that touches society as a whole.

EXAMPLE QUESTION:

Why should Pell Grant eligibility be reinstated for incarcerated Americans?

EXAMPLE ANSWER:

Pell should be reinstated because all barriers to higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals must be removed. Studies have shown that access to higher education goes a long way in reducing recidivism and promoting public safety. Not to mention the effect it has in transforming lives.



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By repealing the ban on Pell Grants we better prepare those re-entering the community to find gainful employment, reduce dependence on public assistance, in turn strengthening families and communities.

Framing the Message

Framing provides a focused context to a discussion or a topic. When we say we will speak about access to higher education within the human rights frame, we mean that we will deliver messages that convey access to higher education in relation to well, --human rights!

There is no “one” frame. Much like you can crop a photo and frame it to focus the viewer’s attention; we can do the same when messaging to draw our audience’s attention to a particular idea. Depending on the audience to which we are speaking, how we frame our arguments can determine how effective we will be in getting our point across. It is important to know your audience beforehand. No matter how good your argument is, delivered in the wrong frame to the wrong crowd can actually do more harm than good.

Examples of Frames: The following are potential frames that you can utilize depending on the audience. The purpose of these frames is not to serve as talking points, but rather provide the context by which you will speak about our issues. (Coalition, 2014)

Civil Rights/ Criminal Justice

Example: “Reinstating Pell grant eligibility to those who are currently and formerly incarcerated is a civil rights issue. The landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* sought to open the doors of educational opportunity to everyone despite race. But the sad truth is that our broken criminal justice system incarcerates people of color at disproportionate rates compared to their white counterparts. By denying those in prison and those who have been released access to education the very promise of *Brown* is being threatened.”

Human Rights

Article 26, of the United Nations International Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has a right to an education. Fundamentally, education access is viewed as an inalienable right that should not be denied. The UN’s International Declaration of Human Rights notes that everyone has a right to an education. No exception is made for someone who is in prison.

Economics

The average cost of incarcerating an individual in the United States for a year for tax-payers is roughly \$30,000, while the cost of one year of college while in prison is only \$5,000. Knowing that access to education leads to reduced recidivism, that \$5,000 can be viewed as an investment in an individual who will return to the community with a college degree able to compete in today’s economy. This also means that individual will be less likely to rely on public assistance and will contribute to the state as a tax-payer, further benefitting their community.



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Human Impact

The families of currently and formerly incarcerated individuals are often left out of the conversation when discussing re-entry and reintegration issues. The policy changes that EIO Coalition strives for go far beyond affecting just one person. The benefits of an education can have positive ripple effects on the families and communities of impacted individuals.

Public Safety

Studies show that access to education both in and after prison has a dramatic effect in reducing recidivism rates. By ensuring access to education for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals we increase public safety and reduce crime. It is one of the most effective tools in keeping our communities safe.

Legislative Advocacy Guide:

Social Media for Lobbying and Advocacy

Social media is a fantastic tool for grassroots lobbying. It allows you to reach a larger audience, and gives you opportunities to leverage support from a diverse group of people. Students have a major role to play in mobilizing peers to support legislation, and one of the ways to do that is to use an online platform.

Facebook

- Facebook is a great way to get people involved in lobbying.
- You can share the REAL Act [petition](#)
- You can tag your Senators or Representatives in posts
- You can also advertise for lobbying events, or post a short example letter along with the physical addresses and emails of your Representatives and Senators and ask your friends and followers to send letters and emails to their Congressperson.
 - Link to look up your Congressperson:
<https://www.opencongress.org/people/zipcodelookup>
 - It is best to send letters to the D.C. office, but you can also send letters to the local offices- especially if you plan to have a meeting with them at any point.
 - Sometimes the email options are actually forms you fill out on the website, in which case you can copy the link to that page and put it on your Facebook post.

Twitter

- Create a twitter account for your student organization, and include the name of your school in your Twitter handle. Alternatively, use your personal twitter account.



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- You can use Twitter to start your own hashtag, or use the hashtags below:
 - #GetREAL
 - #EducationNotIncarceration
 - #TheREALAct
- You can tweet at your Representatives and Senators about the REAL Act.
- If you are a student, tweet at your university faculty asking them to support the bill and sign the petition.
- Tweet at celebrities that you think might support the bill. Ask them to share.

Advocating to the Media

The media plays a huge part in how well legislation does. In fact, when working with a Congressional office to develop new legislation, one of the first things they'll ask is "how is the media framing this issue?" Developing a relationship with the media as well as creating a positive narrative around the issue is a great way to ensure that Members of Congress and the general population view the REAL Act favorably.

Letter to the Editor

Basic Steps:

- Identify local daily newspapers or school newspapers.
- Look in the paper or online to their letters to the editor section to find the criteria for submitting a letter. Sometimes there are word limits- if so, be extremely concise!
- Read a few letters to the editor that they have published to get an idea of how writers begin them.
- (Optional) Identify local area peacebuilding entities to mention.
- Ascertain whether your two US Senators and/or any local US House Members are already co-sponsoring REAL Act (so you will know whether to thank them or urge them to co-sponsor)
- Write and submit your letter, using their criteria and the E.P.I.C. format below.

The "E.P.I.C." Format

Engage:

Start with an interesting hook. Scanning the paper for articles to respond to is a great way to bring the editors in.



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Problem:

Mention (in your own words) the national tragedy of high rates of incarceration and recidivism, and the extreme decline in education programs for incarcerated people. You might also talk about the lack of infrastructure in place to help formerly incarcerated people re-integrate and find stability in their communities once released from prison.

Inform About the Solution:

The REAL Act is your solution, in this case. The bill would create greater access to education for people experiencing incarceration, and would thus strengthen communities, save money, reduce recidivism, and boost the economy.

Call to Action:

Thank your US Senators and Members of the House of Representatives (by name) for co-sponsoring the bill or ask them to do so if they are not co-sponsors. You might also call on fellow citizens to join you in advocating and provide them with your contact information.

Signing Off

Indicate if you represent a student group, community organization etc.

Lobbying Congress

This section is full of information about lobbying congress, and will give you a step-by-step explanation of how to be effective. If you have a meeting with Congressional staff, email spa@peacealliance.org to make sure you have the most up-to-date materials to bring! We will also coach you and answer any questions you may have!

Building a relationship with Congress

As a constituent, you have the power to make your voice heard to your Representative or Senator. We need your help to pass this bill, and connecting with your law-makers is a vital part of the struggle for justice.

The most effective way to get co-sponsorship or support for a bill is to have meetings with staff, aides, or directly with the Representatives and Senators. Building a relationship with your Member of Congress and their staff is much easier than you think! It can start with a simple letter, **but it's important to commit to some follow up actions in order to build on that initial communication.**

If you are doing a letter writing campaign on campus or in your community, you should also at least follow up with a phone call to confirm that the office has read the letters and to ensure that they will take a look at the bill.



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EDUCATION FROM
THE INSIDE OUT COALITION



Here are the stages of communication:

Step 1: Write letter to Representative or Senator

Step 2: Make follow-up phone call(s)

Step 3: Set up an in-person meeting

Step 4: Make follow-up phone call(s)

Breaking Down the Steps

Writing the letter:

Prep:

- Determine whether your Senators or Representatives are already co-sponsors of the bill, so you know whether to write them a letter urging them to support the REAL Act or thanking them for co-sponsoring.
 - You can search online to find who your Members of Congress are, and you can also search “The REAL Act” on Congress.gov to find out who has signed on.
- You can either hand write the letter or send it via contact form on the website of your Members
 - If you are hosting events, make sure to bring paper, stamps, pens, and print out the addresses where attendees can send the letter.

Outline:

- Introduce yourself AS A CONSITUTENT.
- Speak from your heart. Share any relevant personal story about why this issue is important to you.
- Share some statistics on the impact that education can have for people experiencing incarceration.
- Thank your Senators or Representatives for their co-sponsorship of the bill, or if they are not yet co-sponsors, ask them to co-sponsor the bill.
- Request that they respond to you, so you know what position they are taking on the bill. This helps them form an official stance. If they are already a supporter, ask them to become a champion by sending out a “Dear Colleague Letter.”



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Follow-up after you've sent the letter: Preparing for the Call

Scheduling a Meeting with a Congressional Office (Local or in D.C.)

By Phone:

- Make a list of what you want to say to the scheduler and have it with you when you make the call to schedule a meeting. It may sound silly, and you may never even look at it, but it will boost your confidence and give you a better idea of what you plan to say.
- Check your Senator or Representative's website. They will list the phone number for both the D.C. office and any other local offices they have. Write down the number.
- Tell them who you are, what group you're with and that you recently reached out to the office about the REAL Act and you'd like to set up a meeting with the relevant staffer to follow-up.
 - The beginning of the call might go something like this, "Hi, I'm calling as a representative of the Student Peace Alliance chapter at XYZ University. I recently sent a letter to the office about a piece of legislation called the REAL Act, which addresses issues of education for people impacted by the justice system. I am hoping to schedule a meeting with whichever staffer deals with these issues most closely. Can you connect me with that staffer, or schedule a time for us to come in and meet them?"
- Give them some possible dates for a meeting, and tell them who else will be attending.
- Schedule the meeting, and confirm with them the day before by calling to make sure your appointment didn't get bumped.
- Remember, if they don't pick up on the first round, you can leave a message and try calling again in a few hours.

By Email:

- Call the local or DC office and ask for the name of the person who deals directly with justice issues.
 - This will likely be a legislative assistant or legislative director.
 - You will want to get that person's email address – but technically they are not able to give out email addresses for staffer so instead, take the following steps:
- If you're calling a Representative's office, ask if their email address is "standard House form" which means it will be `firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov`.
- If you're calling a Senator's office, ask if their email address is "standard Senate form" which means it will be `firstname_lastname@senator'slastname.senate.gov`, and if they tell you it is "Standard Judiciary form" that means the email address will be `firstname_lastname@judiciary-rep.senate.gov`
- Send an email asking to meet with them about the REAL Act, a bill to improve access to education for people impacted by the justice system. Let them know when you're available and how many people will be present.



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Sample Agenda for REAL Act Meeting:

Introductions

- First, thank the aide or Congressperson for meeting with you.
- Everyone in the group should introduce themselves and say where they are from.
- Be sure to ask the aide about themselves, too! You can ask what brought them into this work, what their area of focus is etc.
- Share a little bit about your group. What are you doing on campus? What is something you've accomplished that you feel proud of?

Overview of the REAL Act

- Highlight the key elements of the bill.
- Talk about why this legislation is important to you
- Share information about the success of the bill, which can include the number of co-sponsors or the names of co-sponsors that they might know of. Find out where the bill is in the process of getting it passed.

Connecting the REAL Act to your district or state

- Talk about how incarceration is affecting your community, congressional district, or state. If possible, provide one or two local statistics. If you can't find any, national numbers are still very helpful.

Talking with Representatives or Senators

- Thank them for something they've done. Looking at their websites beforehand will help you understand the accomplishments or topics that they most value. If you can find something relating to violence prevention, education, or support for prison reform, that would be best.
- Emphasize the aspects of the REAL Act that match the work they've been doing.

Questions

- Answer any questions the aide may have. You should be familiar enough with the bill to answer major questions such as where the bill stands in committee, and who the lead co-sponsors are. You can always call us to find out these answers. Type these answers up and make copies for the aide to keep.
- If you don't know the answers to their questions, let them know that you will find out for them. This is a great opportunity to build a relationship after the meeting is over. DO NOT make up an answer that you think is right, but aren't sure of.

Make the ask

- Make a clear ask for you Representative or Senator to commit to an action, whether it is signing on to the REAL Act or becoming a champion for the legislation by writing a "Dear Colleague Letter" if they are already a co-sponsor.
- It is important to be direct and specific in your ask. Ask a question requiring a yes or no answer, such as "Will the Senator sign on to this legislation?" If the aide cannot give you a direct answer right away, be sure to get all of their contact information, and ask them to give you a deadline by which time they will have an answer. Follow up with them if they haven't gotten back to you by that time.

Closing the meeting



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- Thank the aide for meeting with you.
- Confirm any agreements for follow up and provide them with the contact information of a point-person in your group.
- Ask to take a picture with the aide or Congressperson! Always get a picture of your group lobbying for use on social media and to be featured on our blog.

After the meeting

- Promptly send them a written thank you note or thank you email.
- Follow through with any promises you've made.

General tips:

- Maintain a respectful dialogue at all times, even when you disagree.
- It's helpful to have one person facilitate the meeting. When you're in the meeting, conversation can get away from the original agenda because of questions or opinions that may arise. The facilitator's job is to keep the meeting on track, smoothly transition through the conversation, and make sure that everyone is included.
- Everyone should have something to say, and parts can be assigned when you create the meeting agenda.
- The meeting is a conversation and part of building a relationship, so add something personal. You can share what has drawn you to this work or any programs or experiences that have inspired or affected you.
- Build trust by being truthful in everything you say. If you don't know something, offer to find out and follow up with an answer after the meeting.
- Be persistent, but not harassing. Congressional staffers are busy and may not return your call immediately, but do not give up! Checking in once a month shows you're still concerned about the issue, checking in every day might feel harassing.
- Be aware of how much time you have and respect the time that has been given to you.
- Remember to take pictures! Don't be afraid to ask the aide or Congressperson for pictures. They will always oblige!

Materials to bring:

- The Pell Grant Fact Sheet provided on EIO and SPA's websites are a great resource for your staffer. You can also print off the first section of this manual.
- If you can find information, create a fact sheet with local statistics about incarceration.

Follow up with SPA

Please let us know if you are lobbying or taking action on the REAL Act. We would love to hear about which resources were helpful to you, what we can improve on, and what your experience was like. If you need coaching or support through the process of lobbying or developing programming on campus, please reach out to SPA@peacealliance.org.



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For more information please visit:

www.StudentPeaceAlliance.org and www.eicoalition.org/#home

¹ Get Real: Pass Pell for Incarcerated Students. (n.d.). <http://www.wordpress.eicoalition.org/getreal/>

² Education from the Inside Out Coalition Messaging Guide. (2014).

³ Fact Sheet: Restoration of Pell Grant Eligibility. (2014, September 24).

⁴ Press Releases Edwards Introduces Pell Grants For Prisoners Bill. (2015, May 21).

http://donnaedwards.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=784:edwards-introduces-pell-grants-for-prisoners-bill&catid=10&Itemid=18

⁵ Education as Crime Prevention: The Case for Reinstating Pell Grant Eligibility for the Incarcerated

http://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/crime_report.pdf

⁶ Education from the Inside Out Coalition REAL Act Lobbying Toolkit (2015)