



## The Education Trust—Midwest

**September 16, 2020**

### **House Resolution and House Bills 6171-6172 - Support**

Chair Hornberger and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Resolution 234 and House Bills 6171 and 6172. Taken together, these bills would advance important policies for ensuring that postsecondary education is within reach for students.

**House Resolution 234** urges Congress to lift the harmful ban on access to the Pell Grant for students in prison. We support this legislation, as we believe that students who are incarcerated should have the opportunity through postsecondary education to change their lives and the lives of their families.

The evidence is clear: higher education in prison pays healthy dividends to incarcerated students, to prison culture and to the broader public. Higher education is the surest path to social mobility and opportunity. Expanding access to quality higher education can be transformative for individuals impacted by the criminal justice system.

Bipartisan federal legislation to lift the ban on Pell Grants for prison education will help returning citizens succeed when they come home and make our communities stronger and safer.

**House Bills 6171 and 6172** address important challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that this pandemic does not negatively impact the ability for Michigan students to finance their postsecondary education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a highly disruptive, direct impact on postsecondary education and prompted uncertainty about the school year now underway. The health and related economic crisis also may have an impact on postsecondary enrollment. House Bill 6171 addresses this reality by temporarily extending the time period that eligible students have for using tuition grants for up to two additional semesters, if they are currently enrolled and were enrolled last spring.

Another educational impact of the pandemic last spring was the cancellation of year-end assessments. This includes the SAT, provided by the State annually to high school juniors during the school day. Among other uses, student SAT scores are part of the qualifying criteria for the need and merit-based Michigan Competitive Scholarship.

Under House Bill 6172, scholastic achievement may be used to temporarily replace the competitive scholarship eligibility requirement, usually satisfied by SAT score, for scholarship award eligibility during the 2020-2021 school year. The legislation also temporarily extends by one year the time period that scholarship recipients have to completely spend their scholarship, for students enrolled this academic year and last spring.

Michigan's students, families and communities are best served when postsecondary opportunities are available and accessible. House Resolution 234 and House Bills 6171 and 6172 would all help to address barriers to postsecondary accessibility to Michigan students. We urge you to support these efforts and thank you for your focus on this important topic.