

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



CHAIRMAN Special Committee on Aging

Higher Education Grant Flexibility Act

In 2019, 21 percent of undergraduate students reported having a disability and were eligible to receive accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act¹. Some common accommodations for students include extra time on tests, interpreters, assistive technology, and for some, a reduced course load. Currently, students who receive a reduced course load as an approved disability accommodation have their financial aid prorated as a result. This affects multiple aspects of a student's financial aid package, the most significant of which is the federal Pell Grant.

32 percent of undergraduate students receive some form of Pell award², making it the largest federal grant program for undergraduate students.³ And as 51 percent of all Pell grants go to students whose annual family income is less than \$20,000, it is critical that all of these students, regardless of disability status, are eligible to claim their full award. Our most financially vulnerable students should not be forced to choose between receiving accommodations they need to succeed in the classroom and their full Pell Grant award. The Higher Education Grant Flexibility Act would fix this problem by making students who take a reduced course load as an approved accommodation eligible for their full award, the same as other full-time students.

How would the Higher Education Grant Flexibility Act help?

The Higher Education Grant Flexibility Act would allow students taking a reduced course load of at least 5 credits as an approved disability accommodation at their university to receive the same Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), and TEACH Grant as other full-time students. In order to receive the full award, students still need to comply with their university's processes, procedures, and documentation requirements for receiving a reduced course load as an approved accommodation under disability rights laws. The Higher Education Grant Flexibility Act will make it possible for students with disabilities to utilize the disability accommodations they are entitled to by law without financial consequences.

Supporters— Association on Higher Education And Disability, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, The Autism Society of America, Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, National Center for Learning Disabilities, National Disability Rights Network, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Council of Administrators of Special Education, Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, National Disability Institute, American College Health Association, Higher Education Consortium for Special Education, Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children, The Arc of the United States, Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, Eye to Eye, Foundations for Divergent Minds, Tourette Syndrome Association of America, College Student Educators International

Cosponsors— Senators Van Hollen, Booker

¹ <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=60>

² <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/trendgenerator/app/answer/8/35>

³ <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cuc/financial-aid-sources#:~:text=These%20are%20distinct%20forms%20of,for%20a%20Federal%20Pell%20Grant.>