



**NATIONAL CONSUMERS LEAGUE**

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August 28, 2023

The Honorable Ron Wyden  
Chairman  
Committee on Finance  
Unites States Senate

The Honorable Mike Crapo  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Finance  
Unites States Senate

**Re: National Consumers League Support for the College for All Act of 2023**

Dear Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Crapo,

The National Consumers League<sup>1</sup> (NCL) urges the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance to favorably report S.1963, or the College for All Act of 2023, without delay. The College for All Act would transform the nation’s system of higher education by allowing millions of students to pursue college degrees that they otherwise could not afford. Additionally, it would prevent student debt from continuing to burden future attendees of higher learning, a significant issue currently affecting graduates, individuals with partial educational attainment, and parents of students.

The cost of attending higher education has risen to rates that have become prohibitive for a significant portion of the population. With tuition and fees at four-year institutions 179% greater than they were 20 years ago, the average cost of public tuition for one year is just

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1899, the National Consumers League is the nation’s pioneering consumer advocacy organization. A 501(c)(3) non-partisan organization, NCL represents consumers and workers on marketplace and employment issues. <https://nclnet.org/about-ncl/about-us/>

under \$10,000.<sup>2</sup> When combined with other expenditures, like room and board, the average cost of attendance for public four-year institutions totals \$26,000 per year—or \$104,000 over four years.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, affordability is reported as the biggest hurdle to college attendance, with 55% of adults who are not enrolled in a postsecondary education program citing cost as a barrier.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, roughly 42% of former college students cited financial strain as a reason for abandoning their studies.<sup>5</sup> Unsurprisingly, such a system has resulted in a staggering total of \$1.57 trillion in student loan debt—second only to mortgages as the largest source of consumer debt.<sup>6</sup>

It is critical to note that the unaffordable cost of college does not impact all students equally. While millions of students take out loans each year to cover education expenses, the average person of color—especially Black individuals—typically incurs a greater student debt balance than their white peers.<sup>7</sup> This racial disparity in student debt balances exacerbates other socioeconomic inequalities as well, like wage and wealth gaps for Black women<sup>8</sup> and individuals with disabilities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hanson, Melanie. “Average Cost of College by Year” *Education Data Initiative*. (January 9, 2022)

<https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college-by-year>

<sup>3</sup> Hanson, Melanie. “Average Cost of College & Tuition” *Education Data Initiative*. (June 25, 2023)

<https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college>

<sup>4</sup> “The State of Higher Education 2023” *Gallup and Lumina Foundation*. (2023)

<https://www.gallup.com/analytics/468986/state-of-higher-education.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> “New Research Answers Question Every College Wants to Know: Why Do Students Leave and How Do We Get Them Back?” *UPCEA*. (December 1, 2021)

<https://upcea.edu/new-research-answers-question-every-college-wants-to-know-why-do-students-leave-and-how-do-we-get-them-back/>

<sup>6</sup> “Household Debt and Credit Report (Q2 2023)” *Federal Reserve Bank of New York*. (August 8, 2023)

<https://www.newyorkfed.org/microeconomics/hhdc>

<sup>7</sup> “Survey of Consumer Finances, 1989 – 2019; Education installment loans by race or ethnicity” *Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System*. (November 04, 2021)

[https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/scf/dataviz/scf/table/#series:Education Installment Loans;demo](https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/scf/dataviz/scf/table/#series:Education%20Installment%20Loans;demo)

[graphic:racecl4;population:all;units:mean;](https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/scf/dataviz/scf/table/#series:Education%20Installment%20Loans;demo;graphic:racecl4;population:all;units:mean;)

“Federal Loan Debt 4 Years After Completion” *National Center for Education Statistics*. (2020)

<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=900>

<sup>8</sup> Roux, Mathilde. “5 Facts About Black Women in the Labor Force” *U.S. Department of Labor Blog*. (August 3, 2021)

<https://blog.dol.gov/2021/08/03/5-facts-about-black-women-in-the-labor-force>

<sup>9</sup> Yin, Shaewitz, and Megra. “An Uneven Playing Field: The Lack of Equal Pay for People With Disabilities”

*American Institutes for Research*. (December 2014)

<https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/Lack%20of%20Equal%20Pay%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities%20Dec%202014.pdf>

The College for All Act addresses college unaffordability by allowing the vast majority of students to attend public colleges and universities without paying for tuition. Furthermore, it would double the maximum Pell Grant Award and allow students to use their Pell Grant for non-tuition costs, such as living expenses. Lastly, the College for All Act would double mandatory federal funding of minority-serving institutions (like Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Tribal Colleges and Universities) and significantly expand programs aimed at improving educational outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A postsecondary degree can be transformative in a consumer's life. The median individual with a bachelor's degree earned 37% more than those with an associate's degree, who in turn earned 13% more than those with no postsecondary education.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the inherent educational benefits of continued learning, the significant financial advantages should not be limited to only those who can afford the cost of tuition or years (if not decades) of debt repayment. To this end, NCL strongly supports the College for All Act and urges the Committee to favorably report S.1963.

Sincerely,

Eden Iscil  
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National Consumers League  
[edeni@nclnet.org](mailto:edeni@nclnet.org)

cc: U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Chairman Bernie Sanders

U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Ranking Member Bill Cassidy

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<sup>10</sup> "Annual Earnings by Educational Attainment" *National Center for Education Statistics*. (May 2023)  
<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cba>