



AFSCME 65 Family:

IMPORTANT MESSAGE REGARDING THE FREE COLLEGE PROGRAM

We previously sent out communications regarding the “Free College” program. The U.S. Department of Education notified our “Free College” partners — Eastern Gateway Community College (EGCC), Central State University and Paul Quinn College — that they could no longer offer no-cost college to our members and their families. The department indicated that the financing of the program for students not eligible for Pell Grants is inconsistent with federal requirements. **As a result, new students may not enroll.**

There is no financial liability owed by any former or existing students who participated in the program. We are engaged in discussions with the department and EGCC concerning the continuing education of existing students. Continuation at no cost should not be an issue for any student who qualifies for a **Pell Grant**. For those who are not Pell eligible, and do not have an alternative source of funding, such as an employer or union trust funded tuition assistance program, we are seeking to continue Free College until their education is complete, but we do not now have an assurance that will be the case.

The Free College program is an outstanding benefit, in some cases life-changing, for AFSCME members and their families. I was proud that we could offer the opportunity to obtain a debt free education to our members and I am committed to finding an alternative program. By offering this benefit, we learned that **a large percentage of our members are eligible for Pell Grants**. This federal program provides eligible students with up to \$6,895 a year in education assistance depending on various factors such as income, cost of attendance, and full or part-time student status. The grants are portable and can be used at almost any accredited college or university. To find out if you are eligible, you will need to complete an application form and the college’s financial office will calculate your eligibility before you enroll. https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/pell?link_id=4&can_id=7e70c46eae857759c61d263497c077f&source=email-update-about-the-free-college-program-3&email_referrer=email_1611006&email_subject=update-about-the-free-college-program

I am sorry to report this disappointing news, but we will make every effort to at least partially fill the void left by the cessation of the Free College program.

In solidarity,

Lee Saunders

AFSCME President