

# U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Working to make college more affordable and accessible for Wisconsin students

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin, a member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP), successfully secured provisions from her *Working Students Act* in the year-end, bipartisan government funding legislation to support students who are working their way through school. This year-end, bipartisan government funding legislation, which Baldwin voted for, passed the full Congress on Monday night and now heads to the President's desk to be signed into law.

“In Wisconsin, I’ve heard firsthand from students and graduates struggling with the cost of higher education. As the pandemic continues to present students and families with challenging financial situations, we must do everything we can to make college and its related expenses more affordable, so we can build a stronger path to the middle class for all Americans,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “Students who work while in school should not be penalized with less access to financial aid. I’m proud my legislation has passed both chambers of Congress because now more than ever, we must ensure that working students have the opportunity to earn an affordable higher education and succeed in the workforce.”

Senator Baldwin [introduced](#) the *Working Students Act* with Representative Ami Bera (D-CA) in October 2019. This legislation is cosponsored by Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Tim Kaine (D-VA).

Nearly 44 million Americans have outstanding student loans. According to data from the Federal Reserve, student loan debt totals more than \$1.6 trillion across the country. The rising debt load makes it more difficult for young professionals to purchase homes, automobiles, and other goods, creating a huge drag on the overall economy.

Currently, students who work while attending school often are eligible for less financial aid due to their work income. The provisions included in the year-end, bipartisan government funding legislation from Baldwin's *Working Students Act* will allow students that must work while in college to complete their degrees more quickly and with less debt. Specifically, these provisions will increase support for working students and families by reducing the "work penalty" that many students face when working to support themselves and pay for the rising costs of college. The year-end, bipartisan government funding legislation enacts a 35 percent increase for working students and 20 percent increase for families to the income protection allowance (IPA), shielding more of their income from reducing their financial aid.

The year-end, bipartisan government funding legislation includes additional reforms to make college more affordable and accessible to more students, including provisions that will:

- **Restore Pell grant eligibility for incarcerated individuals**, by removing a counterproductive prohibition that has encouraged recidivism and limits incarcerated individuals' ability to support themselves and their families upon release. Especially important during this pandemic, investing in post-secondary education for incarcerated individuals has also been shown to [improve conditions inside prisons](#);
- **Restore Pell Grant eligibility for defrauded students**, by resetting the clock on a student's eligibility if they are defrauded by predatory for-profit colleges and successfully receive a borrower defense discharge; and

- **Restore Pell Grant eligibility for students with drug-related offenses**, by repealing a 1998 prohibition on federal financial aid for college students convicted of a drug offense, which disproportionately disqualifies students of color and students with low incomes from receiving aid.
- **Expand eligibility for the maximum Pell Grant award**, by ensuring that all families who make under 175 percent, and single parents who make under 225 percent, of the federal poverty level will receive a maximum Pell Grant.
- **Make critical investments in our nation's HBCUs**, by forgiving the debt HBCUs have received to finance capital infrastructure projects and allowing HBCUs to redirect that spending on educating their students.
- **Support students with low-incomes and student parents**, by requiring the Secretary of Education to notify students of their eligibility of programs that support students' basic needs, including housing and food security and access to child care.
- **Remove barriers to financial aid for students experiencing homelessness and students formerly in foster care**, by easing the application and determination process for becoming eligible for aid.

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