

Financial Aid Barriers for Students Impacted by the Justice System

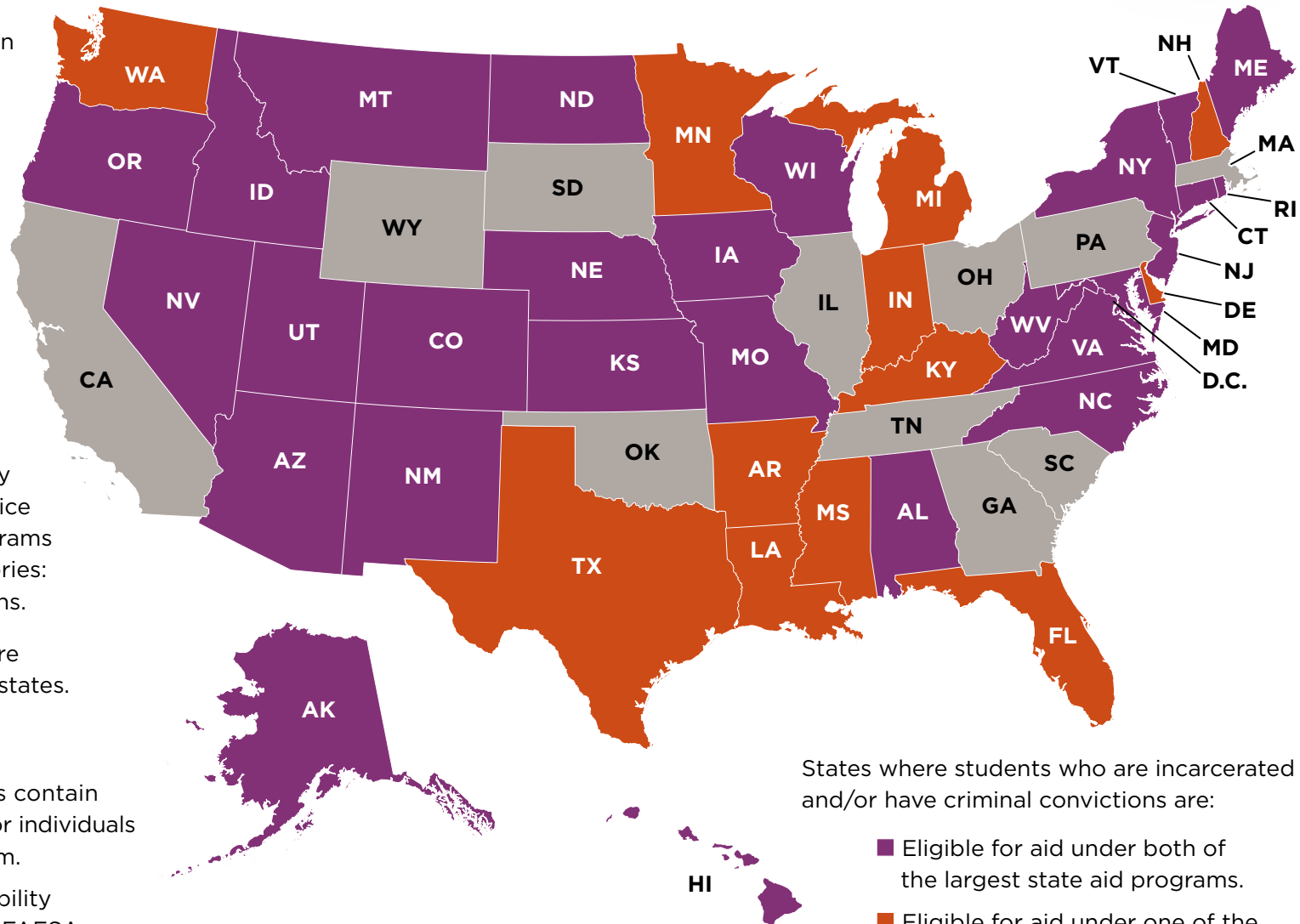
Cost is a barrier to many who want to pursue a postsecondary education and even more so for those who are impacted by the justice system. While the [FAFSA Simplification Act](#) restored federal Pell Grant eligibility for students with drug convictions and those in carceral settings, Pell Grants often don't cover the full cost of attendance. **State financial aid programs** may help fill in gaps but are sometimes unavailable to students impacted by the justice system.

Factors in state policy that disqualify many students impacted by the justice system from state financial aid programs generally fall into one of two categories: incarceration and criminal convictions.

Click on a state abbreviation for more information or click [here](#) to view all states.

Takeaways

- At least 33 programs' policies contain restrictions that limit access for individuals impacted by the justice system.
- At least 19 programs link eligibility to Pell Grant eligibility. Under FAFSA simplification, students impacted by the justice system will be automatically eligible for those programs.



Relevant Legislation



New York [S.B. 8006C](#) (2022) removed the ban on financial aid eligibility for students who are incarcerated.



New Jersey [S.B. 2055](#) (2019) repealed provisions making individuals who are incarcerated ineligible for state financial aid. Individuals qualify as long as they were a resident of the state for at least 12 months immediately prior to the date of incarceration, were state-sentenced and received approval from the Department of Corrections to enroll in an eligible higher education institution.



Oklahoma [S.B. 11](#) (2024) makes individuals who are incarcerated and are within five years of release eligible for a state tuition aid grant. However, individuals who are enrolled in virtual learning programs are not eligible.

State Highlight



California has adopted policies that provide financial resources beyond state aid for students impacted by the justice system. In [2014](#), the state expanded access in California state correctional facilities to include face-to-face community college courses that lead to degrees or certificates and result in enhanced workforce skills or transfer to a four-year university. S.B. 1391 did this through an inter-agency agreement between the Office of the Chancellor of California Community Colleges and the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Four pilot programs were funded with \$400,000 grants.

Other community colleges [leveraged](#):

- Full-time equivalent student general apportionment.
- Student equity resources.
- Categorical funding.
- Special state funds.
- Federal financial aid.
- Private funding.

Resources

- [50-State Comparison: State Financial Aid Barriers for Students Impacted by the Justice System](#)
- [State Policies to Support Learners Impacted by the Justice System](#)
- [Expanding Education Access for Justice-Impacted Students](#)
- [Partnering for Success: Expanding Education Access for Justice-Impacted Individuals](#) webinar
- [50-State Comparison: Need- and Merit-Based Financial Aid](#)

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Did You Know

Students must meet state residency requirements to be eligible for nearly all state aid programs and to qualify for in-state tuition rates. Incarceration may not count toward required length of residence. Further, students who are incarcerated may not be able to produce documents proving they met residency requirements prior to incarceration — especially if they did not have stable housing.