April 1, 2019

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: ABA Support for the Restoring Education and Learning (“REAL”) Act

Dear Senator Schatz:

On behalf of the American Bar Association, I write to express our appreciation for your leadership in introducing the Restoring Education and Learning (“REAL”) Act. This bill would restore Pell Grant eligibility for those seeking to improve their lives through education while in prison. As the RAND Corporation reported in 2013 following its analysis of data from multiple studies, correctional education programs decrease recidivism and increase ex-offender employability. By reducing crime in this way, the REAL Act would have a positive impact on public safety while lowering costs to taxpayers.

The ABA has long supported providing grant funds for correctional education to facilitate reentry and reduce recidivism. Prisoner eligibility for Pell Grants was removed in 1994 as part of a “tough on crime” policy and with the promise of cost savings. After 25 years, we are unaware of tangible benefits from denying prisoners eligibility for Pell Grants. The savings realized by not issuing grants to prisoners has been offset by the commensurate costs of increased criminal processing, correctional housing, and the release of recidivist offenders back into the community with limited opportunities to support themselves and their families.

The REAL Act provides an important measure that benefits society and promotes the success of important bipartisan, evidence-based criminal justice system improvements enacted last year. We commend you on your leadership on this important issue and stand ready to support this legislation so that it may be enacted this Congress.

If you have any questions regarding the ABA’s position on this legislation, please contact Ken Goldsmith, Senior Legislative Counsel (202) 662-1789; kenneth.goldsmith@americanbar.org.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Carlson

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