December 13, 2010

The Honorable John Kerry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Scott Brown
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Kerry and Brown:

We write to express our deep concern about the critical shortfall in funding for the federal Pell program. We are hopeful that you will take steps to address this matter during the next few weeks as the Congress considers FY11 funding.

As you know, the federal Pell Grant program provides vital grant funding to assist the neediest American students in pursuing higher education. In our state, students received over $420 million in 2009, with funding expected to grow to over $506 million by 2011. We greatly appreciate the work of the Congress in recent years to support the program and make it more predictable to students and their families. However, the recent recession has stressed the program and its funding. As with past economic downturns, college attendance has increased as young people and workers seek skills and training, and need has grown as family incomes have declined. This has caused a shortfall in the Pell program of over $5 billion. While budget rules are complex, we understand that this shortfall, if left unaddressed by Congress, could cause the maximum Pell grant to drop by over $800 next fall.

While each of us invests substantial institutional resources to address student access and affordability on our campuses, the Pell Grant is a foundational program that not only provides critical grant aid but also drives college aspirations for families and young people across the nation.

Thank you for your efforts, and please let us know if we can provide any assistance in this matter.

Drew Gilpin Faust
President
Harvard University

Lawrence S. Bacow
President
Tufts University

Robert A. Brown
President
Boston University

Joseph E. Aoun
President
Northeastern University

Susan Hockfield
President
MIT

Jack M. Wilson
President
UMass

Keith Motley
Chancellor
UMass Boston

Fr. William Leahy
President
Boston College