

Frequently Asked Questions About Access Missouri and Keep Me In College Coalition

What is the Access Missouri Financial Assistance Program?

Access Missouri is a need-based financial aid program that was designed to accomplish three things. First, Access Missouri provides financial support to our state's financially eligible students. Second, the awards are portable, allowing students to use their Access Missouri award at any accredited public or independent institution of their choice in Missouri. And finally, Access Missouri funds flow directly to students, rather than institutions. It was created after careful analysis and extensive input from financial aid professionals, the Coordinating Board for Higher Education and the General Assembly to ensure that students with demonstrated financial need could obtain a college education. Eligibility is determined by the student's expected family contribution (EFC) as calculated through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Access Missouri is working as intended, helping some 40,000 students from working and lower-income families attend college in our state. The Coordinating Board for Higher Education has even noted that "the positive impact in terms of the number and financial need of students served has been overwhelming."

What is the threat to Access Missouri?

Once again, there is an effort in the state Legislature to drastically reduce Access Missouri financial aid for Missouri students who attend independent colleges and universities in our state. Senate Bill 784 would cap the maximum amount awarded to eligible students attending four-year institutions at \$2,850 per year.

This proposal would compound the financial burden of tens of thousands of students from working and lower-income families who attend independent institutions by reducing their maximum state financial aid by \$1,750 per academic year. At the same time, SB 784 would increase maximum awards for students attending four-year public institutions by \$700 per academic year. It's not fair, and we can't allow this to happen!

Due to the advocacy of students, parents and educators of Keep Me In College Coalition, a similar threat was successfully averted in the 2009 Legislative session.

We urge you to contact your state lawmakers and tell them how important Access Missouri is to you. We must make it clear that Access Missouri should be left alone and any change would unfairly deny students with demonstrated financial need access to a college education.

Am I at risk of losing my Access Missouri grant?

Contact your college's financial aid director to discuss your personal situation. Missouri's independent institutions remain committed to helping students find the financial aid that meets their needs and also are taking action to protect Access Missouri.

What is the Keep Me In College Coalition?

The Keep Me In College Coalition is comprised of students, parents, education leaders and concerned citizens who believe that our state should continue its tradition of making a college education affordable for all Missouri students with demonstrated financial need, attending any eligible Missouri college or university.

We have come together to make our voices heard to state legislators and policymakers who might consider unacceptable changes to the Access Missouri program. We believe that the awards are fairly distributed because they are based on a percentage of tuition and fees to attend college in each sector.

The \$92-million Access Missouri program is flat funded from the last year's appropriations. Unfortunately, the average maximum Access Missouri awards have been slashed by 22 percent due to an increase in the number of students going to college and a spike in financial need. Students who attend four-year public universities will now receive \$470 less — \$1,680 compared to \$2,150. And private university students receive \$1,010 less — \$3,590 instead of \$4,600.

In this time of economic uncertainty, it would be wrong to balance Missouri's budget on the backs of college students who are already having trouble making ends meet. All of us deserve the chance to obtain a college education. Access Missouri allows students of working families to do just that.

How can I join the Coalition?

Simply go to our Web site at www.KeepMeInCollege.org and complete the online membership form. Joining will cost you nothing – but it could keep you and your friends in college.

What can I do to protect my Access Missouri financial aid?

There are four simple things you can do to protect the Access Missouri program.

1. Join our Coalition online at www.KeepMeInCollege.org. Invite your friends and family to join, too.
2. Write or call your elected state representatives and them that need-based financial aid must be protected for all Missouri students with demonstrated need, attending any eligible Missouri college. Visit our Web site to look up your state lawmakers' contact information, find talking points and sample letters.
3. Be a Coalition volunteer. Organize campus letter writing parties. Post flyers about the threat to Access Missouri. Recruit new Keep Me In College Coalition members on your campus and in your home community (parents, friends, family). Contact us through www.KeepMeInCollege.org
4. Share your story. Visit our Student Stories page to read about how important Access Missouri is to students in our state and learn how to share your story with policymakers through our Web site.