TO	Delaware officials, advocates, families, and people in custody
STATUS	Public-source review; current through August 14, 2026

Pell Grants for People in Delaware Custody

What money exists, who can receive it, the exact forms and mailing address, Delaware program status, and a plan to reach every eligible learner

BOTTOM LINE

For 2026–27, an eligible student may receive up to $7,395—but a sentenced person can receive Pell only through a federally eligible Prison Education Program (PEP). FAFSA is necessary, but FAFSA alone does not create admission, a class seat, or a payment to an inmate account. The latest public sources do not disclose a dollar amount of Pell eligibility lost specifically by people in Delaware custody.

The immediate action is simple: ask the facility education office and Delaware Tech, in writing, which 2026–27 PEP is federally approved and accepting students at that facility; then submit the incarcerated-student FAFSA using Delaware Tech school code 011727.

The question, completed

A precise version of the concern is: How many people in Delaware's care and custody could qualify for Pell-funded postsecondary education, how many were actually screened, admitted, enrolled, and awarded aid at each facility, how many dollars were disbursed, what barriers stopped the rest, and what must Delaware do so every eligible person has a real pathway to an approved degree or job credential?

1. How much money is really "left over"?

Figure	What it means	What it does not mean
$4.4 billion	NCAN's estimate of Pell eligibility foregone by about 830,000 Pell-eligible members of the U.S. high-school class of 2024 who did not complete FAFSA. [1]	Not a federal account reserved for Delaware or for prisoners.
$8.3 million	NCAN's Delaware estimate for the high-school class of 2023 that did not complete FAFSA. [2]	Not an estimate for Delaware inmates.
About $11.4 billion	An older, 2024-reported federal Pell carryover/reserve projection going into FY2025. [3]	Not individually claimable money; not current.

Figure	What it means	What it does not mean
–$5.45 billion	CBO's February 2026 estimated cumulative Pell program shortfall for FY2026, even after listed additional budget authority. [4]	There is no current overall "surplus pot" for applicants to divide.
Up to $7,395	The 2026–27 maximum Pell award for one eligible student. The actual award depends on the FAFSA result, enrollment intensity, and allowable cost of attendance. [5]	Not automatically $7,395; not paid as unrestricted cash to a sentenced student.
Unknown publicly	The amount of Pell aid not accessed by eligible people in Delaware custody. Public reporting does not provide the needed applicant, eligibility, award, or wait-list totals.	No defensible Delaware inmate dollar total can be stated without agency data.

Why both stories can be true

People can leave individual Pell eligibility "on the table" by never completing FAFSA or never reaching an eligible program, while the Pell program's congressional budget account is projected to have a shortfall. One is missed student access; the other is federal budget accounting.

What an incarcerated student actually receives

- The college applies Pell to the allowable cost of the approved program—generally tuition, required fees, books, and supplies for an incarcerated student. [6]
- The award cannot exceed the incarcerated student's allowable cost of attendance, even if the FAFSA calculation would otherwise support more. [6]
- A confined or incarcerated student may not receive a Title IV credit-balance refund. In ordinary words: leftover Pell is not deposited in the inmate's account. [6]
- The usual Pell lifetime limit applies—roughly 12 full-time semesters or the equivalent. Prior Pell use counts. [7]

2. The legal doorway: the program must be an eligible PEP

Pell eligibility for confined or incarcerated people was restored effective July 1, 2023. For a person serving a criminal sentence in a prison, jail, or similar correctional institution, federal rules require enrollment or acceptance for enrollment in an eligible Prison Education Program. A random online college, correspondence course, vocational class, or prison class is not enough. [8]

THREE APPROVALS ARE INVOLVED

A prison program generally needs correctional oversight approval and a written agreement, accreditor approval, and final U.S. Department of Education approval before Pell can be disbursed. Accreditation by itself is important—but it is not the final federal green light. [9]

Custody status changes the route

Person's status	Pell route	PEP required?
Serving a criminal sentence in prison or jail	Enroll in a federally eligible prison education program and complete FAFSA.	Yes.
Pretrial detainee—not yet serving a criminal sentence	May use ordinary Title IV eligibility at an eligible college, subject to normal rules and practical access.	No, under the federal incarcerated-student rule. [10]
Halfway house, home detention, or weekend-only confinement	May use ordinary Pell and other Title IV aid at an eligible institution.	No, if the arrangement fits federal definitions. [10]
Released from custody	Use ordinary Pell at any eligible institution/program; transfer PEP credits and update address/status with the school.	No.
Juvenile delinquency finding	A delinquency adjudication is not treated as a criminal sentence for this rule; normal aid eligibility may apply.	Generally no. [10]
Civil commitment after incarceration	Federal guidance says the person is not treated as incarcerated for this Pell restriction.	No. [8]

Basic student eligibility still applies

- Demonstrate financial need through FAFSA and be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen.
- Have a valid Social Security number unless a federal exception applies; identity data should match Social Security records.
- Be admitted as a regular student in an eligible undergraduate degree or certificate program and generally not already hold a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree.
- Have a qualifying high-school diploma, GED or other recognized equivalent, homeschool completion, or an allowed ability-to-benefit pathway.
- Not be in unresolved default on a federal student loan or owe an unresolved federal grant overpayment; satisfactory arrangements may restore eligibility.
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress after enrollment. [11]

3. Delaware: what is publicly documented

Delaware's Department of Education reports prison education at all four Level V institutions: Baylor Women's Correctional Institution (BWCI), Howard R. Young Correctional Institution (HRYCI), James T. Vaughn Correctional Center (JTVCC), and Sussex Correctional Institution (SCI). Its public page lists academic, vocational, and transition services and a statewide Prison Education Program Office. [12]

Delaware Tech PEPs approved within accreditation

Facility	Accreditor-approved Delaware Tech PEP(s)	Action before relying on Pell
BWCI	A.S. General Studies; A.A.S. Human Services	Confirm current U.S. Department of Education approval, operation, admission criteria, and seats.
SCI	A.S. General Studies	Confirm current federal approval, operation, admission criteria, and seats.
JTVCC	A.S. General Studies	Confirm current federal approval, operation, admission criteria, and seats.
HRYCI	A.S. General Studies	Confirm current federal approval, operation, admission criteria, and seats.

Source and caution: Middle States records show the PEP additions and programs, with actions in June 2025 and subsequent site-verification activity. Those records establish accreditor action—not by themselves final federal approval or current enrollment capacity. [13]

What older Delaware data shows—and does not show

- In FY2022–23, Delaware reported a Delaware Tech Second Chance Pell project at BWCI and SCI, FAFSA sessions, and 46 total college-level enrollments across all four prisons. That count included several institutions and does not equal 46 Pell recipients. [14]
- The federal Second Chance Pell experiment generally ended June 30, 2026, with limited extensions possible through December 31, 2026. Current access therefore should be verified under the full PEP approval pathway or a documented extension. [6]
- Check the federal PEP tracker, then ask Delaware Tech for written confirmation that the listed program is actually operating and accepting students at that facility and in that award year. [15]

The missing accountability number

Delaware's public materials do not reveal, by facility and year, how many sentenced people were screened, applied to college, completed FAFSA, were Pell eligible, received awards, were wait-listed or denied, or how many Pell dollars were disbursed. Without those counts, "unused" Delaware inmate Pell cannot be calculated.

4. Exactly how an individual inmate applies

1. **Start with the facility education office.** Ask: "Is a federally approved Delaware Tech Prison Education Program accepting students at this facility for 2026–27? Which degree or certificate? How do I apply? Is there a waiting list?" Request the college admission/enrollment packet.
2. **Apply to the college/PEP.** FAFSA is a financial-aid application, not a college admission application. The person must be accepted for enrollment in the eligible PEP. Delaware Tech's single FAFSA school code is 011727. [16]

3. **Use the correct 2026–27 FAFSA.** Use the incarcerated-student PDF if completing by paper. Secure online completion is also permitted when access and identity requirements can be met. The award year is July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027. [17]
4. **Collect identity, family, and 2024 financial information.** Use the person's legal name, date of birth, Social Security number or eligible A-number, marital and dependency information, tax filing/income/assets, and any required spouse or parent contributor information. Most older adults are independent, but incarceration itself is not the only dependency test—follow the FAFSA questions.
5. **Complete consent and handwritten signatures.** Every required contributor must provide consent/approval and the correct full-name signature. Missing consent means federal aid eligibility cannot be calculated. For paper forms, use dark ink, block capitals, fully fill circles/boxes, and do not use checkmarks or X marks. [18]
6. **Copy and mail the original application pages.** Keep a copy. Mail original pages 7–20—including blank pages—in a large envelope with additional postage to the special incarcerated-applicant address below. Do not use the ordinary paper-FAFSA address. [17]
7. **Track the FAFSA Submission Summary.** With an email address, the summary is generally sent in 3–5 days after processing; without email, it is mailed within about three weeks. Check for missing information, corrections, and the Delaware Tech code. Call Federal Student Aid at 1-800-433-3243 to check status. [17]
8. **Finish Delaware Tech's file.** Promptly answer requests for verification, identity, transcripts, default/overpayment resolution, or other documents. The college—not the prison and not the FAFSA processor—makes the final award determination and applies aid to eligible charges.

Official forms and destinations

Item	Where / exact use
2026–27 incarcerated FAFSA — English	Official PDF; print and complete pages as directed. **Download English form**
2026–27 incarcerated FAFSA — Spanish	Official Spanish PDF. **Download Spanish form**
Paper FAFSA tips for incarcerated applicants	Official completion and mailing guidance. **Download official tips**
Mail the FAFSA	Federal Student Aid Programs, P.O. Box 70205, London, KY 40742-0205. Send original pages 7–20, including blanks; extra postage required.
Federal receipt deadline	June 30, 2027. The college must have correct, complete data by the student's last day of enrollment in 2026–27. Delaware's listed state-aid deadline was May 30, 2026; that passing does not by itself close federal Pell eligibility.
Delaware Tech FAFSA code	011727 — include it so FAFSA data goes to Delaware Tech.

Information and documents to gather

- ☐ Legal name, birth date, Social Security number; eligible noncitizen A-number if applicable; identity data matching official records.
- ☐ A reliable mailing address allowed by the facility. If using the facility address, put the inmate number only at the end of the permanent mailing address—not elsewhere on the FAFSA. [18]
- ☐ 2024 federal tax filing status, income, untaxed income/benefits requested by FAFSA, cash/assets, and records for any required contributor.
- ☐ Current marital status and spouse information/signature if the FAFSA requires a spouse contributor.
- ☐ Parent information/signature if the FAFSA determines the student is dependent; ask the college about unusual circumstances or inability to contact parents.
- ☐ High-school diploma/GED record and transcripts from every prior college; request transfer-credit evaluation.
- ☐ Prior federal aid history, including Pell Lifetime Eligibility Used, loan default, or grant overpayment; ask the college for the exact resolution route.
- ☐ A copy of everything mailed, date mailed, tracking or mail-log proof, and the FAFSA Submission Summary when it arrives.

Paper-form mistakes that commonly stop aid

- Using the regular paper FAFSA instead of the form marked for confined or incarcerated applicants, or mailing to the wrong address.
- Omitting pages 7–20 because some are blank, or failing to add enough postage.
- Names, birth dates, or Social Security numbers that do not match federal records or past StudentAid.gov accounts.
- Missing contributor consent, missing signature, initials instead of full legal name, or typed/stamped signatures on a paper form.
- Putting the inmate number in multiple fields; official tips say to use it only at the end of the permanent mailing address.
- Answering that the student wants only a Direct Unsubsidized Loan. Incarcerated applicants should answer “No” because confined students are not eligible for Direct Loans. [18]
- Submitting FAFSA but never completing the separate college/PEP admission and verification requirements.

5. What education Pell can—and cannot—fund

Potentially Pell-funded	Not Pell-funded by itself
An approved associate degree offered as an eligible PEP	Standalone GED, adult basic education, literacy, or remedial preparation not embedded in an eligible postsecondary program
An approved undergraduate certificate/diploma PEP at an eligible public or nonprofit institution	Life-skills, hobby, self-help, or prison vocational classes without federal program eligibility

Potentially Pell-funded	Not Pell-funded by itself
Approved in-person, hybrid, secure distance, or correspondence delivery within an eligible PEP	A random mail-order or online college course selected by the inmate
After release or in a non-incarcerated status, any eligible undergraduate program under normal Pell rules	Graduate study or a second undergraduate credential when federal Pell rules do not permit it

Preparation still matters: Delaware's prison education program provides ABE/GED, Groves Adult High School, vocational, and transition services that may help a person become college-ready. Those services are important, but Pell is postsecondary aid; it ordinarily does not pay for standalone GED/ABE instruction. [12]

New 2026 option: Workforce Pell

Delaware opened its Workforce Pell institutional certification process on August 11, 2026. The initiative is for qualifying short-term programs of 150–599 clock hours lasting at least 8 but less than 15 weeks and aligned with high-demand jobs. Institutions—not individual students—are currently applying to the Delaware Office of Workforce Development, after which federal approval is still required. [19]

For sentenced people

Workforce Pell is a promising expansion route, not an automatic inmate benefit. A short-term program offered inside a correctional institution would still need to satisfy the incarcerated-student PEP requirements before Pell could be paid. Delaware should intentionally design programs that clear both approval systems.

6. Immediate contacts

Contact	Purpose	How
Facility education office	First request: PEP admission packet, current program, wait list, FAFSA assistance, GED/transcript help.	Submit an education request/slip under the facility's procedure; keep a dated copy.
Delaware DOE Prison Education Program Office	Statewide prison education information and escalation.	302-857-3340
Delaware Technical Community College	Confirm 2026–27 federal PEP approval/operation, admission, financial-aid file, school code.	fin-aid@dtcc.edu • 302-857-1000 • school code 011727
Federal Student Aid Information Center	FAFSA help, paper copy, and application status.	1-800-433-3243
FSA ID access support	Restore a disabled StudentAid.gov account/FSA ID.	FSAIDAccessSupport@ed.gov
Federal PEP help	Program-level federal PEP questions for institutions/partners.	PEP@ed.gov

Contact	Purpose	How
Delaware Office of Workforce Development	Workforce Pell program certification and approved-program updates.	Use Delaware DOL Workforce Pell page; institutional process.

Useful official pages: Delaware prison education • Delaware Tech financial-aid application steps • Federal PEP tracker • Delaware Workforce Pell

7. A statewide plan to make access real

Minimum operating standard

☐ Universal screening at intake and at least annually: diploma/GED, prior college credits, basic eligibility, interest, release date, and accommodation needs.

☐ A trained Pell navigator at every Level V facility with scheduled office hours and authority to obtain forms, tax/identity records, transcripts, signatures, mail tracking, and corrections.

☐ A written referral from GED completion into college screening so academic preparation does not become a dead end.

☐ A public, neutral admissions and wait-list policy: eligibility criteria, seat caps, selection method, denial reasons, appeal/escalation, and the next review date.

☐ Continuity rules for lockdowns, facility transfers, hospitalization, release, and community reentry; credits and financial-aid records must follow the student.

☐ Accessible instruction and reasonable accommodations for disabilities, low literacy, limited English, and technology constraints.

☐ Quarterly aggregate reporting—no personal information—by facility, program, race/ethnicity, sex, age band, disability status where lawful, and outcome.

Programs Delaware could build

- Operate the accredited General Studies PEP at all four Level V facilities with enough cohorts to eliminate long, hidden wait lists.
- Expand Human Services and peer-support pathways where graduates are not categorically barred from the intended occupation.
- Create approved certificates in IT support/cybersecurity, logistics, HVAC, electrical, plumbing, welding, advanced manufacturing/CAD, culinary/food safety, business operations, and other fields tied to Delaware demand—after checking licensing and employment restrictions.
- Use in-person, hybrid, secure distance, and approved correspondence formats as operational conditions require; federal guidance permits multiple delivery modes inside an eligible PEP. [10]
- Design Workforce Pell courses as stackable credentials that count toward an associate degree and meet both Workforce Pell and prison-education approval rules.
- Invite additional eligible public and nonprofit colleges to develop PEPs. A proprietary for-profit school cannot be the eligible institution offering a PEP. [6]

8. Data request: find the real unused opportunity

Ask Delaware DOE, DOC, and Delaware Tech for aggregate records for 2023–24, 2024–25, 2025–26, and 2026–27 to date, by facility and program: The response can exclude personally identifiable student information.

- ☐ Current federal PEP approval letter/status, accreditor approval, oversight agreement, operating start date, and any Second Chance Pell extension.
- ☐ People screened; people meeting diploma/GED and admissions prerequisites; people expressing interest; applications issued and returned.
- ☐ College admissions, PEP acceptances, enrollment offers, actual enrollments, and unique students served.
- ☐ FAFSAs started, submitted, processed, rejected, corrected, and completed; median days for each step.
- ☐ Pell-eligible students, recipients, total dollars awarded/disbursed, average award, and charges covered.
- ☐ Wait-list size, denials and reasons, withdrawals, satisfactory academic progress issues, course completions, credits, credentials, transfers, and release-continuation outcomes.
- ☐ Seat capacity, filled seats, unfilled seats, staff vacancies, canceled classes, lockdown-related lost instructional days, and technology/mail barriers.

Model written question to the agencies

SUBJECT: 2026–27 Pell access and PEP status by Delaware correctional facility

Please identify every Prison Education Program available at BWCI, HRYCI, JTVCC, and SCI; provide the date and evidence of final U.S. Department of Education approval; state whether the program is currently operating and accepting 2026–27 students; provide the admission form, criteria, seat capacity, and wait-list procedure; and provide aggregate screening, FAFSA, Pell eligibility, enrollment, disbursement, denial, wait-list, completion, transfer, and release-continuity data for each year since July 1, 2023.

9. One-page applicant action sheet

Applicant name: _____ **DOC/inmate no.:** _____

Facility: _____ **Expected release date:** _____

- ☐ I asked the education office for the currently operating, federally approved PEP and admission packet.
- ☐ I received the program name, college, admission criteria, seat/wait-list status, and the responsible staff member's name.
- ☐ I applied to Delaware Tech/the eligible college—not only to FAFSA.
- ☐ I used the 2026–27 incarcerated FAFSA and entered Delaware Tech code 011727 if that is my school.
- ☐ All required contributors gave consent and signed with full legal names.
- ☐ I copied pages 7–20 and mailed all originals, including blank pages, with sufficient postage to P.O. Box 70205, London, KY 40742-0205.
- ☐ I recorded the mailing date and kept proof: _____.
- ☐ I received/reviewed my FAFSA Submission Summary and corrected all problems.
- ☐ I answered every Delaware Tech verification or document request.
- ☐ I received a written admission, wait-list, or denial decision—and a Pell award notice if eligible.

Education contact/name: _____ **Date:** _____

Next action and deadline:

_____

Sources and official downloads

All websites were reviewed for this brief on August 14, 2026. Program availability and deadlines can change; confirm with the college and facility.

[1] NCAN: Class of 2024 left almost $4.4 billion in Pell eligibility — National high-school FAFSA noncompletion estimate.

[2] NCAN: Delaware State Affordability Profile — Reports $8.3 million for Delaware's class of 2023, not inmates.

[3] NAICU: 2024 CBO Pell surplus projection — Historical reserve reporting.

[4] Congressional Budget Office: Pell Grant Baseline, February 2026 — Current federal budget projection; estimated FY2026 cumulative shortfall.

[5] Federal Student Aid: 2026–27 Pell maximum — Maximum award is $7,395.

[6] Federal Student Aid Handbook 2026–27, Volume 7, Chapter 1 — Incarcerated-student award, cost, credit-balance, and transition rules.

[7] U.S. Department of Education PEP Questions and Answers — Operational federal guidance, including lifetime limits and custody categories.

[8] Federal Student Aid: Pell eligibility for confined or incarcerated individuals — Restoration, definitions, and PEP requirement.

[9] Middle States: Prison Education Program approvals — Explains approval layers.

[10] U.S. Department of Education PEP Q&A—custody categories and delivery — Pretrial, halfway house, juvenile, release, and delivery-mode guidance.

[11] Federal Student Aid eligibility overview — General federal student-aid eligibility.

[12] Delaware Department of Education: Prison Education — Facilities, program types, and statewide phone.

[13] Middle States: Delaware Technical Community College accreditation status — Lists PEP programs and locations within accreditation.

[14] Delaware DOE FY2023 Prison Education Annual Report — Historical college enrollment and Second Chance Pell activity.

[15] Federal Student Aid Prison Education Program tracker — Current federal approved-program lookup; contact institution to verify operation.

[16] Delaware Tech: How to apply for financial aid — School code 011727 and college steps.

[17] Official 2026–27 incarcerated FAFSA announcement and forms — English/Spanish forms and special mailing rule.

[18] Federal Student Aid: Paper FAFSA Tips for Incarcerated Applicants — Signatures, consent, address, mailing, and completion details.

[19] Delaware Department of Labor: Workforce Pell — Short-term program rules, policy, and institutional application.

Important limitation

Only the college can determine aid; a sentenced person can receive Pell only through an approved, operating PEP.