



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 17, 2021

[View Online](#)

Governor Wolf: Nellie Bly Scholarship Program Will Help at Least 44,000 PASSHE Students Afford College

Harrisburg, PA – Governor Tom Wolf wants to bet on 44,000 students to help them earn a college degree while graduating with less debt and building successful lives in Pennsylvania. Today, the governor held a press conference to discuss how his historic Nellie Bly Scholarship Program would provide need-based financial assistance for students at 14 universities in the state's system.

"Our country has a student loan debt crisis and it's a burden that lasts for years and holds young people back from starting a family, buying a home and saving for retirement," said Gov. Wolf. "I am proposing the Nellie Bly Scholarship Program to help college students build lives in their communities rather than struggling to pay student loan bills every month."

The Nellie Bly Scholarship Program provides a scholarship to full-time undergraduate students at the 14 Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) universities who have a household income of under \$104,800. For the most economically disadvantaged students, the scholarship covers the tuition and fees gap not covered by a student's Pell and PA State Grants. In exchange, the students agree to stay in Pennsylvania after graduation for the same number of years for which they receive the benefit or the scholarship becomes a low-interest loan.

The program also creates an Emergency Grant Fund at PASSHE to meet any emergency expenses the scholarship recipients might have, including books, paying final account balances, or other nominal costs that often prohibit students from registering for classes or obtaining transcripts.

The governor was joined for the press conference by Shippensburg University President Laurie A. Carter, Edinboro University senior Sam Bohlen and Acting Education Secretary Noe Ortega.

"Additional investment from the state for our future leaders allows students to focus on building a career and becoming global citizens, while not needing to work a second or third job to help cover expenses," said Shippensburg University President Laurie A. Carter. "It means, for example, that students can focus on internship opportunities or other hands-on experiences that

make them more workforce ready. Such experiences are foundational to student success. We know that students who do internships or have other engagement experiences related to their future employment are more engaged and successful professionals."

"When I graduate from Edinboro in May, I'll take with me incredible knowledge and friendships as well as \$40,000 in debt," said Sam Bohen, a senior at Edinboro University. "Many students are working our way through college by spending our days in class and our nights on the job so that we can afford rent and books. We do all of that hard work and still graduate \$40,000 in debt. The Nellie Bly College Scholarship Program would be incredibly helpful to students at state schools. I want to stay in Pennsylvania and be a part of our future and this program would allow me to do it. I think that is just incredible. I think we should bet on the students of our state schools."

The rising cost of higher education can prevent some students from starting college or graduating. Since 2010, tuition and fees at public higher education institutions have increased by 16 percent.

"The cost of attending college in Pennsylvania continues to prevent students and families from choosing to pursue a postsecondary education," said Acting Secretary of Education Noe Ortega. "For many of our residents, loans have become the primary pathway to a college degree, and students must be willing to accept the burden of debt in order to pursue their dreams. For this reason, I stand with Governor Wolf in support of the Nellie Bly Scholarship Program, which will open doors and create opportunities for students, as well as positively impact our state's workforce and economy."

The scholarship is named in honor of Nellie Bly, an Armstrong County native born in 1864. Bly attended the Indiana Normal School, now Indiana University of Pennsylvania, but left due to the cost. Bly became a pioneering journalist who helped to force reforms to the mental health care system in the early 20th century. Inspired by Jules Verne's novel, Bly also completed a trip around the world in just 72 days.

Nearly a century later, higher education remains too expensive for many low-income and middle-class families. The student loan debt for Pennsylvania residents is \$68 billion, among the highest in the nation, averaging more than \$39,000 per student. Approximately 70 percent of Pennsylvania students have student loans to afford college.

The scholarships benefiting 44,000 students would be funded by repurposing \$199 million in slot machine revenue that is directed to the Pennsylvania Race Horse Development Trust Fund. Approximately 80 percent of the revenue goes to purses for horse owners, many of whom are from other states or countries. The fund has provided more than \$3 billion over 16 years to subsidize the single private industry, which should be ready to support itself in a free-market capitalist economy. This \$3 billion in addition to the traditional support the industry receives from the commonwealth including payments from the Pari-mutuel Wagering Tax and Clean and Green, a preferential tax assessment program, among others. The fund would still support health and pension benefits for horseman organizations as the original slots law intended.

The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education is the largest provider of higher education in the commonwealth with 93,000 students. The university system includes Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester.

MEDIA CONTACT: Lyndsay Kensinger, RA-GVGOVPRESS@pa.gov

###