

December 7, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairwoman  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Leahy, Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Shelby, and Ranking Member Granger,

Thank you for your leadership on workforce and education policy issues throughout the 117th Congress. As you complete work on the fiscal year 2023 omnibus appropriations package, the undersigned organizations urge you to include in the final bill language to expand Pell Grant eligibility to shorter-term education and training programs. The requested language reflects the bipartisan Levin / Gonzalez amendment which passed as part of COMPETES, as well as the proposed bipartisan amendment to USICA offered by Senators Kaine and Portman that was included as part of the manager's package. Both amendments were based on language from the JOBS Act (S. 864, H.R. 2037), which has 50 bipartisan cosponsors in the Senate.

Even before the pandemic, our nation faced a skills mismatch between the existing workforce and job openings, including in sectors such as manufacturing, allied and direct health care, and infrastructure. This situation has only become more acute. Over the past two years we've seen an acceleration in workforce automation and digital transformation. With the rapid pace of technological change, workers and employers need higher education to help them rapidly re-skill throughout their life.

Thousands of community and technical colleges and non-profit career and technical institutions are working to meet the challenges of providing affordable and accessible education and training programs that meet the demands of the 21st century workforce. Additionally, several states have created initiatives to try and address the immediate and future needs of individuals seeking high-quality shorter-term education and training programs. In Virginia, the FastForward program has awarded 32,700 credentials since 2016 with graduates seeing on average a 55 percent increase in wages. Indiana has had more than 50,000 individuals complete a postsecondary credential under its Workforce Ready Grant. Yet, even with these efforts, the demand for these programs often outpaces available resources.

At the federal level there is not a consistent and equitable source of financial assistance for students enrolled in postsecondary education and training programs that fall below 600 clock hours and 15 weeks in length. Many community and technical colleges opted to use formula funding under the temporary Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) to support the expansion of low-cost or no-cost education and training programs that lead to in-demand jobs. However, this is one-time funding intended to respond to the pandemic. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, individuals who have barriers to employment may qualify for financial assistance, however that is not based solely on financial need and is contingent upon available funding which has declined in recent years when adjusting for inflation.

As a growing number of students balance additional obligations outside of school, high-quality short-term programs provide the flexibility many students need to access strong career paths. Expanding Pell Grant eligibility to shorter-term education and training programs will help create affordable and accessible pathways to postsecondary credentials for tens of thousands of students. The JOBS Act also includes safeguards for students and taxpayers to ensure that eligible programs are high-quality, in-demand, and demonstrate wage progression for graduates. They must also be aligned with a recognized postsecondary credential, meet employer hiring requirements including for licensure or certification, and articulate for credit to support longer-term career pathways.

For these reasons, we ask that you include language to expand Pell Grant eligibility to shorter-term education and training programs in the fiscal year 2023 omnibus appropriations package. Access to high-quality education and training opportunities benefits workers, as well as our nation's economy and ability to compete globally. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

CC: Senator Patty Murray, Chair, Senate Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education;  
Senator Roy Blunt, Ranking Member, Senate Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education;  
Representative Tom Cole, Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education;  
Senator Richard Burr, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions;  
Representative Bobby Scott, Chair, House Committee on Education and Labor;  
Representative Virginia Foxx, Ranking Member, House Committee on Education and Labor;  
Senator Tim Kaine;  
Senator Rob Portman;  
Representative Andy Levin;  
Representative Anthony Gonzalez