



# New Bills Mean New Community College Priorities in 2024

**Short-term Pell and workforce grant programs are top legislative asks.**

BY CARRIE WARICK-SMITH

Community college leaders should stress the importance of creating the short-term Pell program, including by sharing specific programs at your colleges that would benefit.

**D**ESPITE HISTORICALLY LOW PRODUCTION DURING 2023, one part of Congress, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, has been working hard and introduced two bipartisan bills in December. The chair and ranking member, Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.), respectively, have co-sponsored two bills that focus on top priorities for community colleges:

- The Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act (H.R. 6585) will create a short-term Pell program.
- A Stronger Workforce for America Act (H.R. 6655) will reauthorize the nation's main workforce law and includes the authorization of the Strengthening Community Colleges Workforce (formerly Training) Grant program.

Representatives Foxx and Scott have been negotiating on short-term Pell as well as on the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) for several years. WIOA was due for reauthorization after five years, and short-term Pell, now referred to as Workforce Pell, has been under consideration since at least 2016. During the 117th Congress, it appeared that a bipartisan WIOA bill would be imminent, but in the end, then-Chair Scott introduced a Democrat-only bill.

In the fall, it looked likely that there would not be much substantive legislation to discuss come February, given the only major accomplishment of 2023 was the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which increased the debt ceiling and set a path for federal spending for fiscal year 2024. However, this compromise led to the eventual ouster of Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), which allowed for the elevation of Rep. Mike Johnson (R-La.) to the speakership. He was able to negotiate a continuing resolution until Feb. 2, 2024, to give Congress more time

When discussing A Stronger Workforce for America Act with Congress, community college leaders should stress the value of the Strengthening Community College Workforce Development grant program, modeled on the Strengthening Community College Training grant program which has been operating successfully for four years.

to determine FY2024 funding levels. This extension into the new year gave Congress breathing room to work on legislation.

Both of these bills include top “asks” of leaders of Congress from community colleges. Their introduction in December makes the February 2024 Community College National Legislative Summit well timed for colleges to visit their members of Congress in Washington.

### Preparing for Workforce Pell Discussions with Congress

There are now two main bipartisan bills that would create a short-term Pell program, which would allow these federal grants to be used for programs lasting 150 to 600 clock hours, or as short as eight weeks. One is the JOBS Act, which ACCT has supported since 2016. Its longtime champion is Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.). He worked for several years with Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio), who retired at the end of last Congress. Now Sen. Mike Braun (R-Ind.) is the co-lead. The bill has also been introduced in the House with bipartisan support, but has not picked up its previous momentum in this Congress. This is likely due to the Education and Workforce leads, Reps. Foxx and Scott, first introducing their own partisan bills earlier in 2023, and now joining together to introduce the Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act. Their bill, however, does not yet have a Senate companion bill.

Is there a preference between these two bills? In the end, neither is perfect, but both would accomplish our goals and are workable. There is more than one way to do this well — though, of course, there are many ways to do it poorly, too. **Community college leaders should stress the importance of creating the short-term Pell program, including by sharing specific programs at your colleges that would benefit.** We support quality measures, often called guardrails, but ask that they come from either easily attainable or federally provided data. Further, presidents and trustees can share the joint letters from ACCT and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), available on the advocacy section of [www.acct.org](http://www.acct.org).

In the end, the final law will not be either of the current bills, but a negotiated compromise. And it’s time for us to push Congress to complete these negotiations and send President Biden a final bill to sign into law.

### Top Priorities for the Workforce Act Reauthorization

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998, reauthorized as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, is again up for

consideration. Community colleges’ top priorities in this bill are the authorization and funding levels for the Strengthening Community College Workforce Development Grant program, the inclusion of community college leaders on workforce development boards, and supporting the streamlining of the process for adding programs to the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). ACCT and AACC call on Congress to fully integrate community colleges into the nation’s workforce development plans and shared this sentiment in a letter responding to the bill’s introduction (available on the advocacy section of [acct.org](http://acct.org)).

**When discussing A Stronger Workforce for America Act with Congress, community college leaders should stress the value of the Strengthening Community College Workforce Development grant program, modeled on the Strengthening Community College Training grant program which has been operating successfully for four years.** Additionally, colleges should share their experiences with the ETPL list and working with their local workforce boards.

### Not Coming to Washington?

If you’re not scheduled to join us in Washington, D.C., for the National Legislative Summit, you can still participate in these important conversations. Congressional offices know early February is when they’ll hear from their community colleges, and if they can’t hear from you in person, please call or email the office (submitting web forms is fine, but sending an email to a specific staffer is far more effective) so you can alert your Senators and all Members of Congress who have your campuses and/or students in their constituencies to the importance of these bills.

Need more information? Check out [nls.acct.org](http://nls.acct.org) for issue backgrounder briefs and the advocacy page on [acct.org](http://acct.org) for copies of letters from ACCT and the legislative action center.



Carrie Warick-Smith is vice president for public policy at ACCT. She can be reached at [cwsmith@acct.org](mailto:cwsmith@acct.org).