

February 5, 2025

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Chair, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cassidy and Ranking Member Sanders,

Collectively, we write to encourage the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) to markup legislation to expand federal Pell Grant program eligibility to high-quality, shorter-term education and training programs.

This week, Senators Kaine, Collins, Smith, and Marshall reintroduced the JOBS Act (S. 383), a bill to update the federal Pell Grant program so that students enrolled in shorter-term training have access to these critical resources. Last Congress this legislation garnered bipartisan support from nearly half the Senate. A version of this legislation was also marked-up and passed out of the House Committee on Education and Workforce last Congress. We hope that the Committee will move to quickly consider this legislation early in 2025 given strong past support for the bill and the urgent need for these policy improvements which would help to address significant skills mismatches in the wider economy.

Investment in workforce training to fill in-demand jobs has strong public support. According to polling conducted by the National Institute for Civil Discourse, eighty-seven percent of respondents expressed strong support for expanding Pell Grant eligibility to cover workforce training programs, irrespective of age or previous educational background. Ninety-two percent of respondents believe that investing in Career and Technical Education (CTE) is crucial for bolstering the nation's workforce and ensuring economic competitiveness in an increasingly globalized market.

The reforms offered by the JOBS Act are needed to support affordable and accessible pathways for students enrolled in programs that provide learners and workers with credentials of value in critical segments of the American economy. At the federal level there is not a consistent source of financial assistance for students enrolled in postsecondary education and training programs that fall below 600 clock hours and 15 weeks in length. This excludes many high-quality non-degree credentialing opportunities in growing, and high-wage industries, such as health care, manufacturing and IT. This limitation also creates an unnecessary financial barrier for many students and workers who may need to fully incur the costs of these programs in absence of student aid or simply not pursue further education and training at all given these challenges.

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 high-quality, shorter-term education and training programs has the potential to create opportunities for tens of thousands of students to remain competitive in today's rapidly changing economy. As Congress considers this expansion of the Pell Grant program we recommend that eligible programs have sufficient quality guardrails, including requirements that the programs are in-demand

and lead to strong outcomes for students. We believe that the JOBS Act provides a strong foundation for realizing this wider vision.

We ask the HELP Committee take action on this important issue in the months ahead. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

American Association of Community Colleges

Association of Community College Trustees

Association for Career and Technical Education

Advance CTE

Jobs for the Future

Joint Center

National Association of Workforce Boards

National Skills Coalition

PHI

Rebuilding America's Middle Class

University Professional and Continuing Education Association