

Community College Legislative Priorities, September 2023

FY 2024 Appropriations

Pell Grants: The Pell Grant maximum should be raised by at least \$250, as approved by the Senate Appropriations committee. This increase will help low-income community college students finance their education, which on average still costs just \$3,860 for a full-time, full-year student, though tuition levels vary by state. Rising costs throughout the economy as well as the reduced purchasing power of the grant make an increase essential to maintaining student access and success.

Strengthening Community College Training Grants (SCCTG): The current funding level of \$65 million should be maintained. This relatively new program ensures tight coordination between business and community colleges to meet local and regional workforce needs. There is growing evidence of this relatively new program's positive impact.

Strengthening Institutions Program (Title III-A of the Higher Education Act): The program should be set at no less than the FY 2023 level. The Strengthening Institutions Program supports local initiatives for institutions that have relatively low resources and serve high percentages of needy students. Colleges undergo fierce competition to secure funding consistent with national priorities.

Workforce/Short-Term Pell Grants

The national economy continues to be held back by a lack of adequately skilled employees. Establishment of short-term Pell Grant eligibility is one key to addressing this. There is bipartisan support for workforce Pell, and a variety of constructive bills have been introduced in both chambers. It is past time for Congress to enact legislation in this area. A final bill should not place unnecessary eligibility restrictions on community college programs, which already are extensively vetted for their quality and workforce relevance.

Taxation of Pell Grants/American Opportunity Tax Credit

Bipartisan legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives (H.R. 3000) that would make Pell Grants non-taxable and ensure that Pell Grant recipients qualify for the \$2,500 American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC). Companion legislation will be introduced shortly in

the Senate. This legislation is a top community college priority because in addition to simplifying the Tax Code, it will ensure that the financially neediest community college students benefit fully from their Pell Grants and that they can qualify for the AOTC, which current law often prevents. Legislators from both parties should support this targeted, common-sense legislation.

Farm Bill

Community colleges play an extensive role in supporting agricultural activity, and with targeted federal assistance they can help achieve national goals in agricultural development, growth, and sustainability. Therefore, AACC supports enactment of the bipartisan, bicameral *Community College Agriculture Advancement Act*. The legislation authorizes \$20 million for new USDA capacity-building grants for community college agriculture, agrobusiness, and renewable resources programs.

The Farm Bill reauthorization also presents an important opportunity to expand and simplify Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility for college students in need. When community college students experience food insecurity, which is all too common, it presents barriers to enrollment, academic success, program completion, and entry into good jobs. While many community college students are currently eligible for SNAP by fulfilling a “student exemption” requirement, the eligibility rules are so complex that many students, families, and administrators are left with the impression that all students are ineligible for these benefits. Congress needs to make the process of qualifying for SNAP much more straightforward for deserving community college students.

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