

## Extend Pell Grant Eligibility to Students in Short-Term Workforce Education Programs

Community colleges strongly support extending Pell Grant eligibility to credit and non-credit shorter-term workforce education programs at institutions of higher education. Under current law, students in educational programs that are shorter than 16 credits, or 600 clock hours, are not eligible to receive Pell Grants.

Pending legislation would modernize the Pell Grant program by helping “non-traditional” college students upgrade their skills and get a better job and enable younger students to begin their path to educational attainment. Community colleges offer many short-term programs in fields such as nursing and medical assistance, information technology, and commercial truck driving, where opportunities for employment are plentiful. States such as Virginia and Washington have recognized the value of quality short-term training programs by providing strong financial support. Community colleges support achieving the same end on a national scale.

Quality short-term job training programs are designed both to respond to immediate employer demand and to create new pathways or career ladders to foster upward mobility. In many cases, students who complete short-term programs receive credit applicable to further programs of study to progress in their careers.

Three bills have been introduced in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress to provide Pell Grant eligibility to students in short-term workforce education programs: the *JOBS Act* (H.R. 793, S. 161), the *Promoting Employment and Lifelong Learning (PELL) Act* (H.R. 496, S. 2442) and the *Jobs to Compete Act* (H.R. 1655). Taken together, these bills demonstrate broad, bipartisan support for short-term, or workforce, Pell Grants.

Though many of the details between the three bills differ, all of them would extend Pell eligibility to programs between 150 and 600 clock hours in length, offered over at least 8 weeks. Under each bill, students would qualify for and receive grants under the same rules that apply to “normal” Pell Grants. The new short-term Pell Grants would count against a student’s lifetime Pell Grant eligibility (the equivalent of 12 full-time semesters).

The three bills take different approaches to “quality assurance,” but in each case it is robust. Community colleges urge Congress to take a streamlined, outcomes-focused approach to quality assurance that would extend eligibility to the greatest number of programs while protecting students’ interests.

The time is now for Congress to translate this broad support into action by passing workforce Pell legislation.

