



December 11, 2023

The Honorable Virginia Foxx  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Education and the Workforce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2176 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-6100

The Honorable Bobby Scott  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Education and the Workforce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2102 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-6100

Dear Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott:

We write on behalf of the nation's community colleges and their more than 10 million students to state our views on the Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act (BWPA) and the Stronger Workforce for America Act (SWAA). We thank you for the many hours that have been devoted to crafting this legislation and welcome its bipartisan nature. Together these bills will help our current and future students better participate in our economy, enabling them to generate family-sustaining wages.

*Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act*

Community colleges continue to enthusiastically support the extension of Pell Grant eligibility to workforce programs between 150 and 599 clock hours in length. Community colleges already offer hundreds of these programs in health care, information technology, transportation, construction, management, and a myriad of other areas. The cost to students remains a significant barrier, making Title IV support essential.

The programs that would become eligible through this legislation are designed to launch people into careers and, often, further study. In some cases, students who have already obtained a college degree or some college credit will return to community college to gain an aptitude that will help them advance economically. The reality is that millions of Americans simply are not able to pursue a years-long college degree, whether it be at a community college or elsewhere. However, they are just as deserving as other college students of federal support for the program of their choice.

The legislation contains strict quality standards to ensure that programs will only qualify if they lead to concrete employment opportunities. While applying new numerical outcomes standards in areas such



as completion, placement, and earnings, it also integrates and overlays existing public and private quality control mechanisms. The bill also ensures that program completers will have pathways to further higher education.

The bill's standards for program eligibility are far more rigorous than any applied to any other Title IV-eligible program, including those contained in the gainful employment regulations. These "guardrails" are so rigorous that in some cases, quality community college workforce education programs will find it difficult to qualify for support. Therefore, we look forward to working with the committee to refine these provisions, particularly the path to eligibility for new programs. The bipartisan JOBS Act may provide a basis for some of these changes.

The bill's limited new expenditures (projected to be one half of 1% of overall Pell Grant program costs) are offset by reductions in support for students. We urge the committee to support this critical new eligibility without any reduction in student aid. We hope that an alternative approach can quickly be identified.

#### *A Stronger Workforce for America Act*

We strongly support this far-reaching and thoughtful legislation, which derives from 25 years of accumulated experience with the federal workforce system that was overhauled in 1998. AACC and ACCT remain focused on ensuring that the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act facilitates full participation of community colleges in the workforce system, a goal that is not yet attained. One strategy to move toward that goal would be to require community college representation on workforce development boards.

There is a particular need to ensure realistic data reporting requirements. The legislation streamlines the process for adding programs to the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), including making qualified Workforce Pell programs automatically eligible for the ETPL. Other ETPL revisions will help to ensure a higher overall level of program quality and clarify that the data to comply with these requirements come from state-level sources.

Also of note is the increased emphasis on training, a longstanding priority of community colleges, including a requirement that local areas spend at least 50% on skills development. The more systematic approach to the use of H-1B revenues that provides for the creation of mandatory-funded \$5,000 Individual Training Accounts represents an advance. These two provisions, along with other



aspects of the legislation, should greatly increase the amount of workforce education that is supported through the workforce development system.

Community colleges particularly applaud the authorization of the Strengthening Community College Workforce Development Grant program, modeled on a highly successful program now in its fourth year of competition. This program helps community colleges enhance workforce education offerings in areas of great demand, working in close cooperation with the private sector. We urge the committee to consider higher authorization levels for this program and the rest of the Act as a strong signal of support for their continued growth over time.

We thank you again for introducing bipartisan legislation that is of such great importance and has a positive impact on our students and the nation's workforce generally. We look forward to working with you as the legislation moves towards enactment in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Sincerely,

Walter G. Bumphus, Ph.D.  
President and CEO  
American Association of Community Colleges

Jee Hang Lee  
President and CEO  
Association of Community College Trustees