



## Community College Legislative Priorities, April 2024

### 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. It is past time for Congress to enact legislation in this area. The House Committee on Education and the Workforce approved the Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act (BWPA) in December 2023, a significant step forward. The full House and Senate must continue this progress by enacting a bill that helps catalyze our nation's workforce by allowing more low- and middle-income individuals to fully participate. The bill should not place unnecessary eligibility restrictions on community college programs, which already are extensively vetted for their quality and workforce relevance. The BWPA's requirements are extremely rigorous.

### Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

Enhance WIOA, and with that the national economy, by bolstering the role of community colleges in the federal workforce development system. WIOA reauthorization legislation should include authorization of the Strengthening Community College Training Grants program, as in A Stronger Workforce for America Act (SWAA, H.R. 6655), reported on a bipartisan basis by the House Education and Workforce Committee. This program is now in its fifth year and has supported dozens of successful partnerships between community colleges, local businesses, and other partners to date.

WIOA legislation should also facilitate the inclusion of community college programs on the eligible trainer provider list and streamline reporting requirements. SWAA takes a step in this direction by automatically including programs that qualify for workforce Pell eligibility on the ETPL. A revised WIOA should also support more training, another major focus of the SWAA.

### FY 2025 Appropriations

**Pell Grants:** The Pell Grant maximum was held flat by Congress this year. Congress should resume annual boosts to keep pace with inflation and make progress towards doubling the maximum award to \$13,000. Increasing the grant helps low-income community college students finance their education, which on average still costs just \$3,990 for a full-time, full-year student. Congress should meet the challenge imposed by rising program costs with additional resources.

**Strengthening Community College Training Grants (SCCTG):** Congress should increase funding for the SCCTG program to \$75 million. 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 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. Congress should reverse the \$10 million cut it made to this program in FY 2024 and fund it at the administration’s request of \$140 million.

### **Taxation of Pell Grants/American Opportunity Tax Credit**

Bipartisan legislation has been introduced in the Senate (S. 2920) and 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). 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 who receive Pell Grants can also qualify for the AOTC, which current law often prevents. Legislators from both parties should support the addition of this targeted, common-sense legislation to any tax legislation that is considered in 2024.

### **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. Community college students commonly experience food insecurity, presenting 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.