

April 2, 2019

The Honorable Mike Braun
United States Senate
374 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
United States Senate
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Braun and Chairman Alexander,

We are writing to express our concerns with your proposal to implement a pilot program for short-term Pell Grants. As you know, postsecondary education and training is critical in today's economy. Approximately 80 percent of all jobs require education beyond high school, yet many good paying jobs remain vacant due to a shortage of qualified workers.

The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) gives an opportunity to provide stronger support for alternate career pathways that align strongly with the needs to employers and industry. One way this can be achieved is through extending Pell Grant eligibility to shorter-term postsecondary programs.

We have worked with Senator Kaine and Senator Portman to refine the Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students Act (JOBS Act), and strongly support this legislation. The JOBS Act would extend Pell Grant eligibility to qualified programs that are between 150 and 600 clock hours and at least 8 weeks in length. The bill includes a number of stringent guardrails to help ensure that eligibility is targeted to high quality programs. The JOBS Act also limits the scale of eligible entities so that federal dollars would not be subject to waste, fraud and abuse and only targeted towards high-skill and high-wage programs. The JOBS Act has received strong bipartisan support in both the 115th and the 116th Congresses. Additionally, we believe the JOBS Act is aligned with the principles outlined in President Trump's HEA reauthorization priorities and FY 2020 budget.

Our organizations believe that short-term Pell Grant eligibility should be made permanent in the HEA reauthorization, rather than being a pilot program. The Department of Education has essentially already done this through an experimental site initiative that occurred during the 2012-2013 and 2016-2017 academic years. Nearly 50 institutions participated in the experiment, and the Department is currently analyzing data on the 3,000 student participants, with plans to release a report later this year. There is no need to repeat these efforts.

Additionally, we cannot support limiting eligibility to only 100 institutions, and only eight programs within those institutions. This would exclude hundreds if not thousands of institutions from providing needed student aid. Furthermore, the bill would limit eligibility to programs between 320 and 600 clock hours. This would exclude hundreds of programs, many in the fields of health care, manufacturing, and computer technology. The proposed bill also fails to define "eligible program" in statute, leaving that to the discretion of the Secretary. We think that it is far preferable to place the definition in law.

We greatly value your leadership and appreciate your interest on this issue. We look forward to working with you to develop legislation in this area that accommodates the needs of employers and students. Please let us know if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

Advance CTE
American Association of Community Colleges
Association for Career and Technical Education
Association of Community College Trustees
CLASP
IBM
National Skills Coalition
Opportunity America