

OPPORTUNITY
AMERICA



Jobs and Careers Coalition

August 2, 2019

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman
Education & Labor Committee
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
Education & Labor Committee
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx,

We write on behalf of the Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition to express our strong support for the *Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students (JOBS) Act*.

As representatives of business and industry, we see first-hand how the economy is changing, expanding demand for workers – particularly technical workers – with more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree.

We know first-hand that short job training programs at community colleges can be highly effective in preparing workers to fill this growing skills gap, and we are eager to see Congress enact reform – the JOBS Act – that would make it easier for employers to collaborate with community colleges.

The Opportunity America Jobs and Career Coalition is a Washington-based business group focused on job training and workforce development. Members include employers and employer associations from a broad range of industries experiencing skills mismatches and worker shortages – IT, manufacturing, construction, retail and hospitality, among others.

What the employers we represent have in common: virtually all face widening skills gaps. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, some 6 million Americans are unemployed today, but 7.3 million jobs stand empty – often because employers can't find workers with the skills to fill them.

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce tracks what it calls "good jobs" – high-paying, in high demand – and recently found 30 million good jobs for workers with less than a bachelor's degree.

Traditional blue-collar jobs are giving way to more highly skilled, technical positions. Workers in virtually all industries, including the service sector, need technical savvy to succeed on the job. And a high school diploma is rarely enough – there are fewer and fewer good jobs for workers with no education or training beyond high school.

But American higher education is still skewed sharply toward traditional academic offerings and bachelor's degrees at the expense of programs that prepare students to meet the growing demand for technical skills.

The good news: community colleges are stepping up to fill this void.

Some of the best new community college programs are developed by educators working with employers who know the skills in demand in their changing industries. Many offerings are shorter than a semester – ideal for students in a hurry to learn the skills they need to get a job or a better job.

Training is often offered in the more flexible, fast-moving continuing education division of the college. Many if not most programs prepare students to earn qualifications – industry certifications, technical certificates and licensure – highly valued in the labor market.

The problem: federal student aid isn't keeping up with this innovation. The Pell Grant program disbursed some \$28.2 billion last year in needs-based funding to cover tuition and other college costs. But Pell Grants are available only to students working to earn academic certificates or degrees, and they cover only programs that are at least a semester in length.

The upshot for students: those who can't pay their own way often have no access to the best job training available in their area.

After years of struggling to provide effective workforce preparation, community colleges across the US are discovering a compelling new approach. But it remains out of reach for thousands of students who could benefit.

The JOBS Act would begin to remedy this situation, making Pell Grants available to students enrolled in short community college job training programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials and skills in demand in the labor market.

Only job training designed with input from employers would be eligible. Offerings would lead to credentials in demand in the local labor market. Eligible programs must meet quality assurance provisions that mirror those in the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)* and the *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V)*. An interagency data-sharing agreement would allow students, parents and policymakers to monitor program outcomes – including the median earnings of graduates.

Reps. Richmond and Gonzalez have studied the landscape and know that some of best workforce offerings available today are as short as 150 clock hours. Their bill makes the change that's needed – permanent change to the law of the land.

Members of the Jobs and Careers Coalition urge you to include the JOBS Act in bipartisan legislation reauthorizing the Higher Education Act. We look forward to working with you and other lawmakers, Republican and Democrat, to enact this badly needed reform.

Yours sincerely,

Aerospace Industries Association
American Supply Association
Associated Builders and Contractors
Associated Equipment Distributors
Associated General Contractors

Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Association of Nutrition & Foodservice Professionals
Automotive Service Excellence Education Foundation
Construction Industry Round Table
Greater Houston Partnership
Independent Electrical Contractors
Leading Builders of America
National Asphalt Pavement Association
National Association of Home Builders
National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)
National Ready Mixed Concrete Association
National Roofing Contractors Association
National Stone, Sand, and Gravel Association
Opportunity America
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Agilant Solutions, Inc.
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Shapiro & Duncan

Alabama Community College System