

March 18, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader of the House of
Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, and Leader McCarthy,

The pandemic economy has exacerbated a problem that already existed – working people do not have access to the training and education they need to succeed in growing industries. The undersigned organizations urge you to address this challenge and expand access to federal Pell grants for high-quality short-term programs, consistent with the bipartisan **Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students (JOBS) Act**, as part of any economic recovery and response package.

There are more than 15 million workers unemployed today and more than 1/3 of the jobs lost over the crisis will be permanent. More than 40 percent of those unemployed have no formal education past high school, but 98 percent of the jobs created after the last recession required some postsecondary education. The Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted [workers of color](#), [women](#), and [workers without a college degree](#), making access to postsecondary learning a necessary component of any inclusive economic recovery.

Occupations that require skills training and short-term credentials were in demand before the pandemic. Now, many of those industries are likely to come roaring back to life, but require workers to have new skills, while job losses in other industries, like hospitality and retail, are more likely to be permanent or slow to come back. High-quality, short-term programs are critical to meeting industry demand and ensuring all workers and businesses can access and contribute to an inclusive economic recovery.

We urge you to make college work for working people by making Pell grants available to high-quality, short-term programs, consistent with the JOBS Act.

The JOBS Act makes higher education work better for working people. By expanding Pell Grant availability to short-term certificates, not just degrees – the program will better meet the postsecondary needs of millions of people who are looking for a job right now and businesses in desperate need of workers. Short-term programs, 54 percent of which take one year or less to complete, are often more practical for students who are also parents, caretakers or working full time, and they are frequently used as on-ramps to further education and off-ramps to the labor market. And Americans agree – 75 percent of voters want to see more nimble, short-term higher education options so that people can quickly retrain. Yet, too often, financial barriers stand in the way of student access to these programs, particularly for workers in poverty.

The JOBS Act responds to our current crisis. Given the current pandemic and resulting changes in our economy, demand for short-term programs is expected to grow even beyond the 80 percent of jobs that currently require some postsecondary education. And even for people with some education past high school, these programs will play a pivotal role in preparing people for technological advances in their current industry or jobs in a different industry. Recent surveys conducted by the Strada Education Network have shown that people considering engaging in education and training within the next five years are leaning toward more nontraditional postsecondary education pathways. The majority (59%) of adults considering enrolling in an education or training program prefer non-degree programs, and their motives are divided evenly between reskilling, upskilling and pursuing personal interests.

The JOBS Act creates a first step on a student's educational pathway. By providing students with financial aid to cover costs of high-quality, short-term programs, the JOBS Act creates a connection to further postsecondary education for students who have been excluded. Further, expanding access to Pell Grants has the potential to increase transferability of these credentials- creating strong educational pathways for learners and increasing learners' likelihood of completion. An [evaluation](#) of the Department of Education's Experimental Sites Initiative to expand Pell Grant eligibility to short-term programs found that enrollment and completion rates were higher for students who received aid for these short-term programs than those who did not – program completion increased by nearly 10 percent when students had access to aid.

The JOBS Act increases racial equity in postsecondary education and in employment opportunities. Expanding Pell Grant availability to high-quality, short-term programs could help more underrepresented adults of color earn postsecondary credentials by making education and training more affordable while creating a pathway for further education. This is especially important given the racial wealth gap and the smaller amount of financial resources available to Black and Latinx families specifically. What's more, since the start of the pandemic, Black and Latinx individuals have been disproportionately impacted by job loss and medical needs. Expanding access to reskilling and upskilling in high-quality, short-term programs will be critical for ensuring Black and Latinx students and workers can be part of and contribute to our economic recovery.

The JOBS Act builds on increasing momentum in the states to provide funding for short-term programs and to set stringent quality control standards. States with tuition assistance programs to serve adult learners have seen strong returns on wages. Program completers of Iowa's GAP Tuition Assistance Program, a program designed by 60 sector partnerships and representing more than 300 employers which prepares workers to enter in-demand occupations, saw an average quarterly wage gain of 37 percent. Virginia's New Economy Workforce Grant Program saw an average wage gain of 25 to 50 percent after participants attained their credential. States have - or are actively working to - set standards for quality non-degree credentials, including Alabama, Colorado, Louisiana, Oregon, New Jersey, and South Dakota.

The JOBS Act responds to business demand. Businesses, especially during the current economic crisis, cannot wait for a pipeline of occupational talent and are the driving force behind institutions offering short-term programs that nimbly and rapidly respond to real-time industry need. Expanding Pell to short-term programs means more workers have access to in-demand skills, more rapidly. Prior to the pandemic, 64 percent of business leaders said it would help their business to make federal financial aid available to people seeking skills training, not just those seeking degrees. Similarly, the National Association of Student Financial Aid

Administrators leveraged surveys, focus groups, interviews and program data on short-term programs to [find](#) that institutions agree on the benefit short-term credential programs have to local economies and adult learners and that businesses are the driving force behind these programs being developed.

The undersigned organizations support the JOBS Act and urge you to respond to the needs of working people and businesses by expanding access to high-quality, short-term programs as one pathway to an inclusive economic recovery.

Sincerely,

Advance CTE

American Association of Community Colleges

Association for Career and Technical Education

Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT)

Business Roundtable

Center for Law and Social Policy

Higher Learning Advocates

Jobs for the Future (JFF)

National Skills Coalition

Opportunity America

Rebuilding America's Middle Class (RAMC)