



August 5, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
HELP Committee
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
HELP Committee
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madame Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr,

I write on behalf of the Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition to express our strong support for Sen. Kaine's amendment #2141 to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act – a provision expanding Pell Grant eligibility to cover short, job-focused college education and training programs.

The Opportunity America Jobs and Careers 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.

As representatives of business and industry, we see first-hand how the economy is changing in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Millions of Americans are still out of work. Many will need to reskill for a new job or a new industry. The pandemic has dramatically accelerated the automation and workplace restructuring that we once called the "future of work." Passage of a national infrastructure initiative will only add to the challenge, sharply increasing demand for skilled technical workers, and the two trends together will require extensive reskilling for years to come across the industries we represent.

For many decades, American higher education has skewed toward traditional academic offerings and bachelor's degrees at the expense of programs that prepare students to meet growing demand for technical skills. Fortunately, this is changing. Community colleges across the US are stepping up to fill the void, offering short, job-focused programs developed in partnership with employers.

Many programs are shorter than a semester. 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.

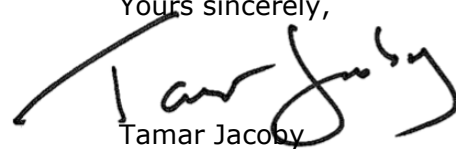
The problem: federal student aid isn't keeping up with this innovation. The Pell Grant program disbursed some \$27.8 billion last year in needs-based funding to cover tuition and other college costs. But as a rule, Pell Grants are available only to students working to earn academic certificates or degrees, 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.

Our coalition has long supported the Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students (JOBS) Act. We were encouraged by the discussion of including a workforce Pell provision in the US Innovation and Competition Act of 2021.

Job training of the kind Sen. Kaine's amendment would pay for will be an essential component of any effort to rebuild the nation's infrastructure, and we strongly urge you to include the amendment in the infrastructure package under consideration this week. We look forward to working with you and other lawmakers, Republican and Democrat, to enact this badly needed reform.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tamar Jacoby". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning and a large loop at the end.

Tamar Jacoby
President