



June 6, 2012

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Shelby:

On behalf of America's community college leadership, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) request your consideration for reinstating Pell Grant eligibility for newly enrolled students who lack a high school diploma or its equivalent but demonstrate college readiness.

Community colleges play an essential role in meeting our labor market's demand for skilled workers with postsecondary credentials. There are currently 3.7 million job openings in the United States, and many are vacant due to a deficit of skilled workers. By 2018, it is expected that nearly two-thirds of all jobs will require some type of postsecondary credential. It is essential to our nation's economy and global competitiveness that we meet the challenge to have more Americans attain higher education.

One way community colleges address this skills gap and related educational needs is by providing education and training programs to students who lack a high school diploma or GED. Eligibility under Ability-to-Benefit (ATB) has assisted these students attain their educational goals through access to federal student aid. As of July 1st, new ATB students will no longer qualify for Pell or other Title IV student aid. Previously, they could receive student aid by passing an independently administered test or successfully completing six college credits. The new policy will likely prevent thousands of community college students from gaining access to higher education. These are students that legislatures and boards have directed community colleges to serve. Additionally, many of these students will be doubly impacted as their access to state student aid is often tied to Title IV eligibility.

Requiring students to complete a GED before attaining a postsecondary credential unnecessarily adds to the time and cost of obtaining a degree or certificate. ATB students are often individuals seeking rapid retraining in a field that will lead to a good job with livable wages. Given the significant wait lists that many students face when they pursue adult education, concurrent enrollment in developmental skills courses and job training programs is an innovative and effective model.

Pell Grants are essential to the educational aspirations of millions of college students. Of those, ATB students face some of the greatest needs and barriers towards completion. Many

community colleges have put into place innovative programs and pathways to address their unique needs. Eliminating Pell Grants access is a short-sighted policy. We urge you to reinstate their eligibility, particularly for those participating in career pathway programs.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Walter G. Bumphus in black ink.

Walter G. Bumphus
AACC President and CEO

Handwritten signature of J. Noah Brown in black ink.

J. Noah Brown
ACCT President and CEO