

April 13, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

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

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairwoman Mikulski, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the nation's more than 1,100 community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) request your continued support for essential programs that create higher education opportunity and prepare the nation's workforce.

With more than 12 million students enrolling annually in community colleges, federal investments in student aid and institutional support are making a significant difference. Federal support remains critical to our institutions, as we seek to graduate more students in high-need areas. While we recognize the constraints that the appropriations committee is under in developing its FY 2017 appropriations bills, AACC and ACCT urge you to consider the following priorities:

The Federal Pell Grant Program

Pell Grants are essential to helping low-income students access and complete higher education. Each year more than 7 million students – 2.9 million community college students -- rely on the program to help pay for tuition, books, fees, transportation, and living expenses. Congress should maintain mandatory and discretionary funding levels for this program, which combined will produce a projected maximum award of \$5,935 in award year 2017-18. Additionally, we urge the committee to refrain from reallocation or rescission of the Pell Grant surplus in FY 2017.

In FY 2011, Congress made the sweeping move to eliminate year-round Pell Grants in order to generate savings for the program. Given that the surplus exists, in part, due to reductions in awards for needy students, we highly encourage Congress to use the current surplus to invest in Pell Grants and reinstate year-round Pell Grants.

Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act programs are the largest ongoing source of federal institutional support for community colleges, helping them to improve all aspects of cutting-edge CTE programs. The Perkins Basic State Grants give postsecondary institutions the flexibility to identify local priorities and to fund innovation in occupational education programs. Community colleges use these grants to improve programs that prepare students for high-skill, in-demand fields by helping them meet challenging academic, vocational, and technical standards; improve curricula; purchase the equipment students need to

know how to use in today's jobs; integrate vocational and academic instruction; and foster better links between colleges and the business community. We urge Congress to restore this program to at least its FY 2012 level.

Adult Basic and Literacy Education State Grants

AACC and ACCT remain very concerned about the still largely unrestored sequester cuts to the Adult Basic and Literacy Education State Grants (ABE) program. This program was reauthorized as part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which established new authorization levels. We call on Congress to fund this program at the level that it felt appropriate when it passed WIOA by overwhelming margins - \$622.3 million. At the least, the state grants should be increased by \$13 million to their pre-sequester level. ABE grants help serve 1.8 million participants each year in gaining reading, numeracy and English literacy, and GED preparation. Demand for these programs, however, far outstrips supply, as tens of thousands of individuals remain on waitlists for services. A recent report from OECD on a survey of adult skills showed that 36 million Americans, or one in six adults, lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. We cannot hope to raise our workforce's educational attainment to the levels demanded by the 21st century economy without adequately addressing the needs of this population.

Strengthen Workforce Development

It is essential that we provide workers with job training programs they need in the changing economy. Continued funding for the federal workforce system is a priority for community colleges in order to maintain access and build programs for training workers. After enactment of WIOA, Congress increased its investments in many of these programs, though they still remain well below their FY 10 levels and the authorization levels noted above. We urge you to continue the upward trend in these investments to match the authorized funding levels in the coming years.

Other Important Funding Priorities

AACC and ACCT support the core principals of the President's America's College Promise proposal to provide additional federal support to cover the cost of tuition and fees for qualified community college students. Community colleges strongly support Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, Federal Work Study, the Strengthening Institutions program (Title III-A of the Higher Education Act), Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, international education, the National Science Foundation Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program, and the TRIO and GEAR UP programs. Cuts to these programs could have a devastating impact on student access and success. Hence we ask for a minimum of level funding for these programs. Additionally, we remain concerned about sustained cuts to the Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program, and request consideration for restored funding.

These investments in our education and workforce system are vital to our nation's economic prosperity and thus also vital to the health of the federal budget over time. We urge you to keep those considerations in mind when allocating resources in FY 2017.

Sincerely,



Walter G. Bumphus
AACC President and CEO



J. Noah Brown
ACCT President and CEO