

May 11, 2015

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Rogers and Cole and Ranking Members Lowey and DeLauro:

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.

We are cognizant of the fact that under the current funding caps set by the Budget Control Act, increasing the essential investments outlined below will be challenging. To that end, we continue to call on Congress to revise current funding caps to support a greater investment in higher education and workforce training. We truly believe that resources dedicated to these programs are investments in a better-educated workforce and citizenry, which will more than pay for themselves through economic and other dividends.

AACC and ACCT urge you to consider the following priorities for FY 2016:

The Federal Pell Grant Program

Pell Grants are essential to helping low-income students access and complete higher education. Each year nearly 9 million students -- 3.3 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 \$5,915 in award year 2016-17. Additionally, we remain concerned regarding cuts to the Pell Grant surplus in the FY 2015 omnibus appropriations bill, and urge the committee to refrain from reallocation of the surplus in FY 2016. We are thankful to the committee for the restoration of Pell Grant eligibility to ability-to-benefit students, and hope to work with you to expand access to a full maximum Pell Grant award for students that first enroll after the FY 2014-2015 academic year.

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 program should be increased by \$26 million to its 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 2016.

Sincerely,



Walter G. Bumphus
AACC President and CEO



J. Noah Brown
ACCT President and CEO