



February 27, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jeffries,

I write on behalf of the Jobs and Careers Coalition to express our strong support for H. R. 6585, the *Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act*, expanding the federal Pell Grant program to provide financial aid for learners in short, job-focused postsecondary education and training programs.

The 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 – construction, manufacturing, IT, retail and hospitality, among others.

As representatives of business and industry, we see first-hand how changing technology is transforming the economy, increasing demand for skilled technical workers and requiring millions of Americans to go back to school for reskilling and upskilling to help them stay abreast of technological changes in the workplace.

The challenge we face as a nation: postsecondary education needs to change to keep up with this technological transformation and its effect on labor market demand.

There is some good news. Change is already under way and has been for more than a decade. Through much of the previous century, American higher education skewed in favor of traditional academic offerings and bachelor's degrees at the expense of programs that prepared students to meet growing demand for technical skills. But this began to change a decade or so ago, when community colleges across the US started 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 hasn't kept up with this innovation. The Pell Grant program disbursed \$27.2 billion last year in needs-based funding to cover tuition and other college costs for some 6 million US students. But as a rule, Pell Grants are available only to learners working to earn academic certificates or degrees, and they cover only programs that are at least a semester in length – 600 clock hours over 15 weeks.

The upshot for students: those who can't pay their own way often have no access to the best job training in their area, which can in many cases be completed in less than 600 clock hours. A typical full-time coding boot camp, for example, runs just eight to 12 weeks, or 320 to 480 instructional hours.

Legislation to address this vital issue has been circulating in Congress since 2017, and our coalition endorsed it year after year as it came and went on Capitol Hill, gathering increasing bipartisan support over the years.

So we are particularly pleased by the significant improvements included in H. R. 6585 – most importantly, the current bill’s new approach to ensuring that programs eligible for student aid will be of the highest quality, preparing learners for high-paying, highly-skilled jobs in in-demand industries.

The key to this new approach: bipartisan recognition that the best way to assess quality is by looking at training outcomes – program completion, job placement and earnings – rather than administrative criteria such as alignment with state licensure requirements or approval by a local workforce development board.

As employers and industry representatives, we strongly support this real-world, outcomes-based approach, and we eagerly anticipate the new stream of essential employees we expect it to produce.

There remains a long way to go to repair the imbalance in American higher education, restoring job-focused programs to their rightful place on a par with traditional academic education. But the *Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act* makes an important start, and we urge the House to pass it without delay.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tamar Jacoby', written over a horizontal line.

Tamar Jacoby
President
Opportunity America

CC: The Honorable Virginia Foxx
The Honorable Bobby Scott
The Honorable Elise Stefanik