

June 13, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
U.S. Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert C. Scott
Chairman
House Education & Labor Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
House Education & Labor Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: Amendment to H.R.4521 - United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2022

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Senator Murray, Senator Burr, Representative Scott, and Representative Foxx:

Thank you for your leadership on higher education and workforce policy issues to ensure all Americans have the skills to get a good-paying job. The undersigned organizations represent innovative universities serving large numbers of working adults, through models that deliver education to best meet the needs of such learners, including through online platforms. We also represent the Skills First Coalition – a new group of employers and education providers that support skills-first policies that shift the focus from traditional degrees as proxies for knowledge to verifiable competencies, skills, and work-based learning opportunities. **We are writing today to call for the elimination of any exclusions to online education programs in expanded Pell eligibility in the final Bipartisan Innovation Act.**

We recognize the bipartisan efforts to expand Pell Grant eligibility to high-quality, short-term skills and job training programs that would allow part-time students and mid-career professionals to qualify for shorter-term learning opportunities, including internships or community college classes. Working adults and students who currently enroll in short-term programs to upgrade their skills must pay out of pocket which creates a barrier for many individuals.

In addition to cost, working adults face a range of barriers to accessing traditional models of post-secondary education and training. Whether due to child or other care challenges, the need to earn a salary to support a family, and other hurdles to flexibility and time, today's working adult learners need education models that recognize these challenges, not compete with them. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation experienced the benefits of the option of online models, and in a recent [survey](#), 73 percent of students indicated a preference to take online courses post-pandemic.

While we acknowledge the original intent of the benchmark JOBS Act (S.864, H.R. 2037), we are concerned the provisions in the House-passed America COMPETES Act that exclude online education programs will weaken the purpose of the provisions to provide access and affordability to students and working adults. Additionally, the exclusion of online programs runs counter to the \$65 billion broadband infrastructure deployment included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that will ensure all Americans have access to reliable high-speed internet to help close the digital divide. Participation in today's economy, and in many of our most important jobs in cybersecurity and information technology, require technical skills and connectivity, and training options must also provide for this modern need.

The language in COMPETES contains protections to support quality programs for learners. We support inclusion of such protections and believe our institutions should be held to all the same standards, regardless of model. More importantly, in the workplace, we are seeing a growing demand for online, high-quality skills training and certification programs that offer the flexibility and relevance for employees and learning outcomes valued by employers who are doing the hiring. However, the language excluding online programs is a penalty, not a protection, for those learners for whom online programs are their only access point to education and training. Because having time and being able to control one's schedule is a function of privilege, allowing only programs that tie students to being at a physical location at a preordained time excludes low-income learners who have less time than others and often do not control their work schedules, as is common in many sectors of the economy.

As the House and Senate work to reconcile the differences between USICA and COMPETES, and move toward passage, we urge the conferees to ensure students who most need access to short-term Pell be able to have the option of participating through online programs. By excluding students in online programs and not aligning it with existing Pell Grant and WIOA regulatory frameworks the COMPETES Act denies access to a significant population of students who must receive the skills needed to be able contribute to the workforce and improve their lives. We ask that you amend the language to remove the online exclusion.

Ensuring all learners have access to training and upskilling is crucial to meeting the demands of the nation's students and working adults. We thank you for your attention to this critical matter and your continued support of higher education and learners throughout the country.

Sincerely,



Scott Pulsipher
President, WGU
Chairman of Board, Presidents Forum



Michael Hansen
Chief Executive Officer
Cengage Group
Co-chair, Skills First Coalition



David N. Barnes
Vice President Global Workforce Policy
IBM Corporation
Co-chair, Skills First Coalition



Ginni Rometty
OneTen Co-Chair &
former CEO and chairman of IBM



Eloy Oakley
Chancellor, California Community Colleges



Paul LeBlanc
President,
Southern New Hampshire University



Sue Ellspermann
President, Ivy Tech Community College



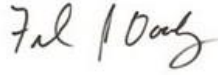
Kate Smith
President, Rio Salado College



Robert Mong
President University of North Texas
at Dallas



David Schejbal
President, Excelsior College



Frank Dooley
President, Purdue University Global



Ed Klonoski
President, Charter Oak State College



Gregory Fowler
President, University of Maryland
Global Campus



E.R. Anderson
Director, Public Affairs
Randstad North America

CC: Senator Tim Kaine
Senator Rob Portman
Representative Andy Levin
Representative Anthony Gonzalez