

**Federal Legislative Priorities for Community Colleges**  
**Maryland Congressional Delegation Meeting**  
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**Presented by**  
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on federal legislative priorities for Maryland's community colleges. We appreciate your past support and recognize that you are always fighting to assure that community colleges get what they need to support our students and our communities. The funds that you have secured for us over past years have supported a variety of initiatives, including student aid and nursing programs – both critical areas at this time. We have worked to maximize the results made possible by this support, recognizing our role as effective stewards of these funds.

During the upcoming legislative session, there are several proposals being considered for which your support is critical. They will each have a tangible impact on the services and programs that we provide and our students' ability to take advantage of them.

Of course, monetary support to students through financial aid is one of the most important ways the federal government assists community college students. However, the federal government also provides funds to a variety of other programs that support the community college mission. President Obama's proposed FY 2010 budget has several requests, including:

- an increase for the maximum **Pell Grant** to \$5,550 and a reclassification of Pell as a mandatory program with increases based on the consumer price index plus one percent;
- the implementation of **direct lending** by eliminating the middle-man in student lending, bypassing big banks and putting funds directly into the hands of students. In Maryland, direct lending would boost Pell funding by \$1.4 billion over the next 10 years;
- an increase to the **Leveraging Education Assistance Partnership (LEAP)** program, which seeks to increase college enrollment among low-income families. The program allows states, which have a great deal of leeway in how funds are used, to test, evaluate and bring to scale experiments in encouraging college completion. Currently, LEAP provides states roughly \$64 million a year to foster investment in need-based aid. President Obama's proposal includes a five-year mandatory \$2.5 billion investment;
- an increase in **Title IIIA, the Strengthening Institutions Program** to \$84 million, a \$4 million increase. Title IIIA gives direct institutional aid to colleges that serve a disproportionate

number of minority, low-income and first generation college students to improve and strengthen their academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability.

In addition to these budget requests, there are several other items for which your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

- The implementation and funding of the **Year-round Pell Grant** was approved as part of the Higher Education Opportunity Act. Now, students taking accelerated course loads are able to receive two Pell Grants in a single academic year. This is great news for students! However, under the proposed regulations, if students' enrollment status changed while they were receiving their second Pell grant in one year, their colleges would be required to recalculate the grant. We are requesting that the Department of Education keep the regulations for the second Pell grant the same as the existing regulations to the greatest extent possible.
- Additionally, President Obama, under the Higher Education Opportunity Act, is seeking to simplify the federal student aid application process by eliminating unnecessary application questions on the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**, allowing families to initiate the financial aid application process through the federal income tax system, and allowing the neediest students to automatically qualify for maximum aid. The new questions focus on adjusted gross income, number of people the family, taxes paid, and wages earned while questions concerning assets have been removed. The new application would go from eight pages to two pages. We are heartily in favor of this proposed change.
- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act included substantial changes to the **Hope Scholarship Tax Credit**. The credit was increased to \$2,500 from the current \$1,800 and it includes course materials as eligible expenses. However, currently, only the non-tuition expenses covered are "course materials" (not transportation or living expenses) and any grant amounts the student receives must be subtracted from "eligible expenses" for the credit.
- The Maryland Association of Community Colleges has consistently supported the passage of the **Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act**, as consistent with the community college mission of access to education for all. The DREAM Act provides a legal pathway to citizenship for young people who were brought to the country by others (before the age of 16), have lived in the U.S. for an extended period of time, and apply themselves to approved activities. If the DREAM Act were approved, students would obtain temporary residency for six years and within that six-year period they would have to earn a two-year degree or serve in the military for two years.

Your consideration of these items is greatly appreciated. Maryland's community colleges are extremely lucky to have such a supportive delegation in D.C. Your invitation to meet

with us today is indicative of this. We have been going through some challenging times, as has much of the country, and we have been greatly affected by the economic recession. Our enrollments have steadily been increasing and a large part of this enrollment is students returning to college because they lost their jobs and are seeking training to secure new employment. However, funding to support the necessary growth in services and faculty these students require has not kept pace. While some increase was granted from the state, in previous years, increases have often been rescinded. County support has at best remained flat. And finally, we are concerned because the money used to provide increases from the state was from federal relief funds so, while we are very grateful for those funds, there is a question about what will happen in future years when that money is not available.

Your past support has helped us become the strong institutions that we are. We realize that during these challenging economic times, you have many requests to balance and prioritize. However, your support is even more necessary as we seek to support students and help them attain their academic and professional goals. Thank you for all the good work that you do to help community college students reach their educational goals.