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| July 8, 2015Dear Colleague:I am writing to inform you of an important development in Washington. [Legislation](http://echo4.bluehornet.com/ct/64643008%3A30563768394%3Am%3A1%3A2560566175%3A3FF9276B5D2AD2D22EB3B1525A2FD27F%3Ar) modeled along the lines of President Obama’s [America’s College Promise proposal](http://echo4.bluehornet.com/ct/64643009%3A30563768394%3Am%3A1%3A2560566175%3A3FF9276B5D2AD2D22EB3B1525A2FD27F%3Ar) is being introduced today in both the Senate and House by Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA), respectively. [AACC supports](http://echo4.bluehornet.com/ct/64643010%3A30563768394%3Am%3A1%3A2560566175%3A3FF9276B5D2AD2D22EB3B1525A2FD27F%3Ar) this legislation. While the legislation is highly unlikely to be enacted in its current form, its introduction marks a significant step in achieving greater access and success to community college.  It also strikes a resounding note that all Americans can attend one of our institutions.This is an extremely ambitious bill.  The authors envision a federal investment of $79.7 billion over the next 10 years to provide free community college tuition to all eligible students.  (Community college students currently receive more than $10 billion annually through the Pell Grant program.)The legislation’s sponsors have been extremely responsive to our suggestions about what would make for a good bill, and for this we are extremely thankful. The legislation is simple and straightforward, and largely devoid of provisions that might unduly confuse potential students about their eligibility or create a complex implementation framework.Some of the bill’s primary features include:* Funds would be awarded to states, upon submission of an accepted application. States would have to commit to “maintenance of effort” equal to or exceeding their average spending on public higher education, including student financial assistance, for the three previous years.  States also would have to provide a 25% match.
* Available funds would be distributed to states according to their proportion of eligible students nationally.
* States would have to commit to certain “evidence-based institutional reforms and innovative practices to improve student outcomes.”  There is not an explicit mandate that any one reform be undertaken, and they are largely consistent with ongoing community college reforms. Alignment between K–12 and postsecondary education, as well as 2- and 4- year public institutions, is also required.
* The bill would mandate that state recipients allocate a portion of funding for public institutions of higher education, including 4-year colleges, on performance. No specific level is required.
* States would receive a payment for each eligible student.  They would receive 75% of the national average community college tuition and fees for residents.  Funds could not increase each year beyond 3% or the average in-state tuition increase across the sector.
* Students would automatically qualify for a full tuition waiver for two academic years or their equivalent if they enroll in programs that can fully transfer via articulation agreement toward a bachelor’s or post-bachelor’s degree at a public institution in the state or are enrolled in an occupational skills training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential that is in an in-demand industry sector or occupation in the state.
* Only first-time students who maintain satisfactory academic progress would be eligible. Students would have to be enrolled on an at least half-time basis.   (The legislation eschews the 2.5 grade point average and financial eligibility cap proposed by the administration.)
* States would ratably reduce their support for students if the funds available were not sufficient to cover all eligible students. Alternatively, if the funds provided to a state exceeded student eligibility, funds could be used for other purposes, such as extending benefits to non-first-time students, program improvement, college readiness, and dual enrollment.
* The legislation provides mandatory, i.e., guaranteed, funding, but it is not “paid for,” meaning that no budgetary reduction or revenue increase has been identified to cover its considerable cost. Until an offset is identified, the legislation does not have a viable path to enactment.

The legislation also includes a much smaller section that provides assistance for students attending 4-year Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Many of the other provisions in this section are modeled along the lines of the community college section, although eligible students would have to be low-income. Significantly, community college transfer-in students could be supported. Funding for this portion of the legislation is about one-eighth the size of the community college section.In responding to this critical development, some of the points you might want to make include: * Community colleges are extremely pleased that there is a far-reaching proposal designed to make community college universally available to all students.  Postsecondary education is a necessity for a family-sustaining income and community college is the place for Americans to receive it.
* Congress should enact some version of this legislation, likely of a smaller size, in the current Congress.  Education remains a cost-effective investment in our citizenry and economy, and community colleges are not a partisan issue.
* If enacted, the legislation would provide further momentum to ongoing reform efforts occurring on campuses across the country, including enhanced counseling, structured academic pathways, and better coordinated workforce connections.

AACC’s work in this area will continue. This includes promoting the concept of universal community college with the public and media, as well as working inside the Beltway with lawmakers of both parties in an effort to generate legislation that can secure support from a broad swath of bipartisan legislators.  For more information, please contact David Baime, senior VP for government relations and policy analysis, or Jim Hermes, AVP for government relations.Sincerely,http://echo4.bluehornet.com/cimages/747a73b26e6771553dc7ccc463ac7445/120WBsig.jpgWalter G. Bumphus, Ph.D.President and CEO |

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