

March 17, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell:

We write today to oppose the exclusion of fully distance education programs from the House-passed America COMPETES Act of 2022 language related to short-term job training Pell grant funding. We appreciate the new short-term job training Pell provisions contained in Section 90305, and we have long advocated for the value and inclusion of these short-term programs to be covered by Pell. We are disheartened that the language is explicit in its removal of distance education offerings, especially as we know the value of the access and flexibility that existing workers, parents, veterans, and new and returning students get from being part of exclusively distance education programs.

We all learned many lessons during the pandemic, including that students want—and need—the flexibility afforded by online learning. Even as students returned to campus, many asked for continued online options—and not just for health-related reasons. They have asked for flexibility in the modality, duration and scheduling of learning that best serves their educational needs. Many students have full-time jobs, are caregivers and were affected by the pandemic in ways that will continue to influence and challenge them.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, before the pandemic, one out of six postsecondary students were fully online students who had already realized the flexibility this learning modality gave them to navigate full-time jobs, family obligations or other needs. More than half of those fully online students attended public institutions, and the number grows to more than 80%

when including nonprofit private institutions. This knocks down the false perceptions that fully online programs are only provided by private for-profit institutions, or that their use is not as widespread as many members of the public and policymakers may generally appreciate.

We at the National Council for Online Education advocate for online programs and students because we know the value that high-quality online learning can provide both to students and the economy. High-quality online learning is the result of faculty trained and supported in online pedagogy, intentional instructional design and a host of other important ingredients that we have been fine-tuning for more than 25 years. This work has been guided over the years by research-supported practices, online course and program design guidelines (such as the Quality Matters Rubric, the OLC Quality Scorecards and the UPCEA Hallmarks of Excellence in Online Leadership), and tools crafted to support faculty in designing quality courses.

We urge you to reconsider this restrictive language and change to be inclusive of fully distance education programs as you consider the discrepancies between the House-passed America COMPETES Act and the Senate-passed U.S. Innovation and Competition Act of 2021 (USICA). Students need this flexibility, and the nation's employers need a skilled and talented workforce. There are high-quality universities around the United States delivering highly-sought after online short-term training programs that upskill and reskill America's workforce. In future legislation and actions we strongly urge you to treat all learners the same regardless of instructional modality. As organizational leaders in distance education, we stand ready to assist in any way possible as we all work together to strengthen America during this time of unprecedented challenges and yet immense opportunity. We appreciate your time and attention to these issues, and we and our institutional members look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

[National Council for Online Education](#)

[Online Learning Consortium](#) (OLC)

[Quality Matters](#) (QM)

[UPCEA](#) (University Professional and Continuing Education Association)

[WCET](#) (WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies).