

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 3401

To establish, improve, or expand high-quality workforce development programs at community colleges, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 9, 2025

Mr. MARSHALL (for himself and Mr. WARNOCK) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To establish, improve, or expand high-quality workforce development programs at community colleges, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Pathways to Prosperity
5 Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY COLLEGES WORK-**
7 **FORCE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS PROGRAM.**

8 Subtitle D of title I of the Workforce Innovation and
9 Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3221 et seq.) is amended—

1 (1) by redesignating section 172 as section 173;

2 and

3 (2) by inserting after section 171 the following:

4 **“SEC. 172. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY COLLEGES WORK-**
 5 **FORCE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS PROGRAM.**

6 “(a) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this section are—

7 “(1) to establish, improve, or expand high-quality
 8 workforce development programs at community
 9 colleges; and

10 “(2) to expand opportunities for individuals to
 11 obtain recognized postsecondary credentials that are
 12 nationally or regionally portable and stackable for
 13 high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industry sectors
 14 or occupations.

15 “(b) STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY COLLEGES
 16 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS PROGRAM.—

17 “(1) IN GENERAL.—From the amounts appro-
 18 priated to carry out this section and not reserved
 19 under paragraph (2), the Secretary shall, on a com-
 20 petitive basis, make grants to eligible institutions to
 21 carry out the activities described in subsection (e).

22 “(2) RESERVATION.—Of the amounts appro-
 23 priated to carry out this section, the Secretary may
 24 reserve not more than 2 percent for the administra-

1 tion of grants awarded under this section, includ-
 2 ing—

3 “(A) providing technical assistance and
 4 targeted outreach to support eligible institu-
 5 tions serving a high number or high percentage
 6 of low-income individuals or individuals with
 7 barriers to employment, and rural-serving eligi-
 8 ble institutions, to provide guidance and assist-
 9 ance in the process of applying for grants under
 10 this section; and

11 “(B) evaluating and reporting on the per-
 12 formance and impact of programs funded under
 13 this section in accordance with subsections (f)
 14 through (h).

15 “(c) AWARD PERIOD.—

16 “(1) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

17 “(A) COVERED GRANT.—The term ‘cov-
 18 ered grant’ means—

19 “(i) if the grant recipient received a
 20 first grant under this section for a period
 21 of more than 1 year, that first grant; and

22 “(ii) if the grant recipient received
 23 first and second grants described in para-
 24 graph (2)(B), that second grant.

1 “(2) PERIODS FOR FIRST AND SECOND
2 GRANTS.—For grants awarded under this section—

3 “(A) each first grant under this section
4 shall be awarded for a period of not more than
5 2 years; and

6 “(B) a recipient that receives a first grant
7 for a period of not more than 1 year, may re-
8 ceive a consecutive second grant for a period of
9 not more than 1 year.

10 “(3) SUBSEQUENT GRANTS.—An eligible insti-
11 tution that receives a covered grant under this sec-
12 tion may receive one or more subsequent grants
13 under this section, but only as described in this
14 paragraph. The institution may not receive a subse-
15 quent grant until the day that is 2 years after the
16 period of the covered grant. The institution may re-
17 ceive a subsequent grant for a period of not more
18 than 2 years, if the eligible institution demonstrates
19 that, during the most recently completed grant pe-
20 riod for a grant received under this section, such eli-
21 gible institution achieved the levels of performance
22 agreed to by the eligible institution with respect to
23 the performance indicators specified in subsection
24 (f).

25 “(d) APPLICATION.—

1 “(1) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible to receive a
2 grant under this section, an eligible institution shall
3 submit an application to the Secretary at such time
4 and in such manner as the Secretary may require.

5 “(2) CONTENTS.—An application submitted by
6 an eligible institution under paragraph (1) shall in-
7 clude a description of each the following:

8 “(A) The extent to which the eligible insti-
9 tution has demonstrated success building part-
10 nerships with employers in high-skill, high-
11 wage, or in-demand industry sectors or occupa-
12 tions to provide students with the skills needed
13 for occupations in such industries and an expla-
14 nation of the results of any such partnerships.

15 “(B) The methods and strategies the eligi-
16 ble institution will use to engage with employers
17 in high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industry
18 sectors or occupations, including any arrange-
19 ments to place individuals who complete the
20 workforce development programs supported by
21 the grant into employment with such employers.

22 “(C) The proposed eligible institution and
23 industry partnership that the eligible institution
24 will establish or maintain to comply with sub-
25 section (e)(1), including—

1 “(i) the roles and responsibilities of
 2 each employer, organization, agency, or in-
 3 stitution of higher education that the eligi-
 4 ble institution will partner with to carry
 5 out the activities under this section; and

6 “(ii) the needs that will be addressed
 7 by such eligible institution and industry
 8 partnership.

9 “(D) One or more high-skill, high-wage, or
 10 in-demand industry sectors or occupations that
 11 such eligible institution and industry partner-
 12 ship will target and real-time labor market data
 13 demonstrating that those industry sectors or oc-
 14 cupations are aligned with employer demand in
 15 the geographic area to be served by the eligible
 16 institution.

17 “(E) The extent to which the eligible insti-
 18 tution can—

19 “(i) leverage additional resources to
 20 support the programs to be funded with
 21 the grant, which shall include written com-
 22 mitments of any leveraged or matching
 23 funds for the proposed programs; and

24 “(ii) demonstrate the future sustain-
 25 ability of each such program.

1 “(F) The steps the institution will take to
2 ensure the high quality of each program to be
3 funded with the grant, including the career
4 pathways within such programs.

5 “(G) The population and geographic area
6 to be served by the eligible institution, including
7 the number of individuals the eligible institution
8 intends to serve during the grant period.

9 “(H) The workforce development programs
10 to be supported by the grant.

11 “(I) The recognized postsecondary creden-
12 tials that are expected to be earned by partici-
13 pants in such workforce development programs
14 and the related high-skill, high-wage, or in-de-
15 mand industry sectors or occupations for which
16 such programs will prepare participants.

17 “(J) The evidence upon which the edu-
18 cation and skills development strategies to be
19 used in such workforce development programs
20 are based and an explanation of how such evi-
21 dence influenced the design of the programs to
22 improve education and employment outcomes.

23 “(K) How activities of the eligible institu-
24 tion are expected to align with the workforce
25 strategies identified in—

1 “(i) any State plan or local plan sub-
 2 mitted under this Act by the State, out-
 3 lying area, or locality in which the eligible
 4 institution is expected to operate;

5 “(ii) any State plan submitted under
 6 section 122 of the Carl D. Perkins Career
 7 and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20
 8 U.S.C. 2342) by such State or outlying
 9 area; and

10 “(iii) any economic development plan
 11 of the chief executive of such State or out-
 12 lying area.

13 “(L) The goals of the eligible institution
 14 with respect to—

15 “(i) capacity building (as described in
 16 subsection (f)(1)(B)); and

17 “(ii) the expected performance of indi-
 18 viduals participating in the programs to be
 19 offered by the eligible institution, including
 20 with respect to any performance indicators
 21 applicable under section 116 or subsection
 22 (f) of this section.

23 “(3) CONSIDERATION OF PREVIOUS EXPERI-
 24 ENCE.—The Secretary may not disqualify an eligible
 25 institution from receiving a grant under this section

1 solely because such institution lacks previous experi-
 2 ence in building partnerships, as described in para-
 3 graph (2)(A).

4 “(4) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants under this
 5 section, the Secretary shall give priority to eligible
 6 institutions that—

7 “(A) will use the grant to serve—

8 “(i) individuals with barriers to em-
 9 ployment; or

10 “(ii) incumbent workers who need to
 11 gain or improve foundational skills to en-
 12 hance their employability;

13 “(B) use competency-based assessments to
 14 award academic credit for prior learning for
 15 programs supported by the grant; or

16 “(C) have, or will seek to have, the career
 17 education programs supported by the grant in-
 18 cluded on the list of eligible providers of train-
 19 ing services under section 122(d) for the State
 20 in which the eligible institution is located.

21 “(e) USES OF FUNDS.—

22 “(1) ELIGIBLE INSTITUTION AND INDUSTRY
 23 PARTNERSHIP.—For the purpose of carrying out the
 24 activities specified in paragraphs (2) and (3), an eli-
 25 gible institution that receives a grant under this sec-

tion shall establish a partnership (or continue an existing partnership) with one or more employers in a high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industry sector or occupation (in this section referred to as an ‘eligible institution and industry partnership’) and shall maintain such partnership for the duration of the grant period. The eligible institution shall ensure that the partnership—

“(A) targets one or more specific high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industries;

“(B) includes collaboration with the workforce development system;

“(C) serves dislocated workers, incumbent workers, and new entrants to the workforce;

“(D) uses an evidence-based program design that is appropriate for the activities carried out by the partnership;

“(E) incorporates work-based learning opportunities; and

“(F) incorporates, to the extent appropriate, virtual service delivery to facilitate technology-enabled learning.

“(2) REQUIRED ACTIVITIES.—An eligible institution that receives a grant under this section shall, in consultation with the employers in the eligible in-

stitution and industry partnership described in paragraph (1)—

“(A) establish, improve, or expand high-quality, evidence-based workforce development programs, which may be career pathway programs or work-based learning programs (including apprenticeship programs or preapprenticeships);

“(B) provide career services to individuals participating in the programs funded with the grant to facilitate retention and program completion, which may include—

“(i) career navigation, coaching, mentorship, and case management services, including providing information and outreach to individuals with barriers to employment to encourage such individuals to participate in programs funded with the grant; and

“(ii) providing access to course materials, technological devices, required equipment, and other supports necessary for participation in and successful completion of such programs; and

1 “(C) make available, in a format that is
2 open, searchable, and easily comparable, infor-
3 mation on—

4 “(i) curricula and recognized postsec-
5 ondary credentials offered through pro-
6 grams funded with the grant, including
7 any curricula or credentials created or fur-
8 ther developed using such grant, which for
9 each recognized postsecondary credential,
10 shall include—

11 “(I) the issuing entity of such
12 credential;

13 “(II) any third-party endorse-
14 ments of such credential;

15 “(III) the occupations for which
16 the credential prepares individuals;

17 “(IV) the skills and competencies
18 necessary to achieve to earn such cre-
19 dential;

20 “(V) the level of mastery of such
21 skills and competencies (including how
22 mastery is assessed); and

23 “(VI) any transfer value or
24 stackability of the credential;

1 “(ii) any skills or competencies devel-
 2 oped by individuals who participate in such
 3 programs beyond the skills and com-
 4 petencies identified in clause (i)(IV); and

5 “(iii) related employment and earn-
 6 ings outcomes on the primary indicators of
 7 performance described in subclauses (I)
 8 through (III) of section 116(b)(2)(A)(i).

9 “(3) ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES.—In addition to
 10 the activities required under paragraph (2), an eligi-
 11 ble institution that receives a grant under this sec-
 12 tion shall, in consultation with the employers in the
 13 eligible institution and industry partnership de-
 14 scribed in paragraph (1), carry out one or more of
 15 the following activities:

16 “(A) Establish, improve, or expand—

17 “(i) articulation agreements (as de-
 18 fined in section 486A(a) of the Higher
 19 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
 20 1093a(a)));

21 “(ii) credit transfer agreements;

22 “(iii) corequisite remediation pro-
 23 grams that enable a student to receive re-
 24 medial education services while enrolled in
 25 a postsecondary course rather than requir-

1 ing the student to receive remedial edu-
2 cation before enrolling in such a course;

3 “(iv) dual or concurrent enrollment
4 programs;

5 “(v) competency-based education and
6 assessment; or

7 “(vi) policies and processes to award
8 academic credit for prior learning or for
9 the programs described in paragraph
10 (2)(A).

11 “(B) Establish or implement plans for pro-
12 viders of the programs described in paragraph
13 (2)(A) to meet the criteria and carry out the
14 procedures necessary to be included on the list
15 of eligible providers of training services de-
16 scribed in section 122(d).

17 “(C) Purchase, lease, or refurbish special-
18 ized equipment as necessary to carry out such
19 programs, provided that not more than 15 per-
20 cent of the funds awarded to the eligible insti-
21 tution under this section may be used for activi-
22 ties described in this subparagraph.

23 “(D) Reduce or eliminate unmet financial
24 need relating to the cost of attendance (as de-
25 fined under section 472 of the Higher Edu-

1 cation Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087ll)) of par-
 2 ticipants in such programs.

3 “(4) ADMINISTRATIVE COST LIMIT.—An eligible
 4 institution may use not more than 7 percent of the
 5 funds awarded under this section for administrative
 6 costs, including costs related to collecting informa-
 7 tion, analysis, and coordination for purposes of sub-
 8 section (f).

9 “(f) LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMANCE
 10 REVIEWS.—

11 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall develop
 12 and implement guidance that establishes the levels
 13 of performance that are expected to be achieved by
 14 each eligible institution receiving a grant under this
 15 section. Such levels of performance shall be estab-
 16 lished on the following indicators:

17 “(A) Each of the primary indicators of
 18 performance for adults described in section
 19 116(b)(2)(A)(i), which shall be applied for all
 20 individuals who participated in a program that
 21 received funding from a grant under this sec-
 22 tion.

23 “(B) The extent to which the eligible insti-
 24 tution built capacity by—

1 “(i) increasing the breadth and depth
 2 of employer engagement and investment in
 3 workforce development programs in the
 4 high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand indus-
 5 try sectors or occupations targeted by the
 6 eligible institution and industry partner-
 7 ship established or maintained by the eligi-
 8 ble institution under subsection (e)(1);

9 “(ii) designing or implementing new
 10 and accelerated instructional techniques or
 11 technologies, including the use of advanced
 12 online and technology-enabled learning
 13 (such as immersive technology); and

14 “(iii) increasing program and policy
 15 alignment across systems and decreasing
 16 duplicative services or service gaps.

17 “(C) With respect to individuals who par-
 18 ticipated in a workforce development program
 19 funded with the grant—

20 “(i) the percentage of participants
 21 who successfully completed the program;
 22 and

23 “(ii) of the participants who were in-
 24 cumbent workers at the time of enrollment
 25 in the program, the percentage who ad-

1 vanced into higher-level positions during or
2 after completing the program.

3 “(2) CONSULTATION AND DETERMINATION OF
4 LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE.—

5 “(A) CONSIDERATION.—In developing lev-
6 els of performance in accordance with para-
7 graph (1), the Secretary shall take into consid-
8 eration the goals of the eligible institution pur-
9 suant to subsection (d)(2)(L).

10 “(B) DETERMINATION.—After completing
11 the consideration required under subparagraph
12 (A), the Secretary shall separately determine
13 the levels of performance that will apply to each
14 eligible institution, taking into account—

15 “(i) the expected levels of performance
16 of each eligible institution with respect to
17 the goals described by the eligible institu-
18 tion pursuant to subsection (d)(2)(L); and

19 “(ii) local economic conditions in the
20 geographic area to be served by the eligible
21 institution, including differences in unem-
22 ployment rates and job losses or gains in
23 the industry sectors or occupations identi-
24 fied in subsection (d)(2)(D).

25 “(C) NOTICE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT.—

1 “(i) NOTICE.—The Secretary shall
 2 provide each eligible institution with a
 3 written notification that sets forth the lev-
 4 els of performance that will apply to the el-
 5 igible institution, as determined under sub-
 6 paragraph (B).

7 “(ii) ACKNOWLEDGMENT.—After re-
 8 ceiving the notification described in clause
 9 (i), each eligible institution shall submit to
 10 the Secretary written confirmation that the
 11 eligible institution—

12 “(I) received the notification; and

13 “(II) agrees to be evaluated in
 14 accordance with the levels of perform-
 15 ance determined by the Secretary.

16 “(3) PERFORMANCE REVIEWS.—On an annual
 17 basis during each year of the grant period, the Sec-
 18 retary shall evaluate the performance during such
 19 year of each eligible institution receiving a grant
 20 under this section in a manner consistent with the
 21 levels of performance determined for such institution
 22 pursuant to paragraph (2).

23 “(4) FAILURE TO MEET LEVELS OF PERFORM-
 24 ANCE.—After conducting an evaluation under para-
 25 graph (3), if the Secretary determines that an eligi-

1 ble institution did not achieve the levels of perform-
 2 ance applicable to the eligible institution under para-
 3 graph (2), the Secretary shall—

4 “(A) provide technical assistance to the eli-
 5 gible institution; and

6 “(B) develop a performance improvement
 7 plan for the eligible institution.

8 “(g) EVALUATIONS AND REPORTS.—

9 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 4 years
 10 after the date on which the first grant is made
 11 under this section, the Secretary shall design and
 12 conduct an evaluation to determine the overall effec-
 13 tiveness of the eligible institutions receiving a grant
 14 under this section.

15 “(2) ELEMENTS.—The evaluation of the effec-
 16 tiveness of eligible institutions conducted under
 17 paragraph (1) shall include an assessment of the
 18 general effectiveness of programs and activities sup-
 19 ported by the grants awarded to such eligible insti-
 20 tutions under this section, including the extent to
 21 which the programs and activities—

22 “(A) developed new, or expanded existing,
 23 successful industry sector strategies, including
 24 the extent to which such eligible institutions
 25 deepened employer engagement and developed

workforce development programs that met industry skill needs;

“(B) created, expanded, or enhanced career pathways, including the extent to which the eligible institutions developed or improved competency-based education and assessment, credit for prior learning, modularized and self-paced curricula, integrated education and workforce development, dual enrollment in secondary and postsecondary career pathways, stacked and latticed credentials, and online and distance learning;

“(C) created alignment between eligible institutions and the workforce development system;

“(D) assisted individuals with finding, retaining, or advancing in employment;

“(E) assisted individuals with earning recognized postsecondary credentials; and

“(F) provided equal access to various demographic groups, including people of different geographic locations, ages, races, national origins, and sexes.

“(3) DESIGN REQUIREMENTS.—The evaluation under this subsection shall—

1 “(A) be designed by the Secretary (acting
2 through the Chief Evaluation Officer) in con-
3 junction with the eligible institutions being eval-
4 uated;

5 “(B) include analysis of program partici-
6 pant feedback and outcome and process meas-
7 ures; and

8 “(C) use designs that employ the most rig-
9 orous analytical and statistical methods that
10 are reasonably feasible, such as the use of con-
11 trol groups.

12 “(4) DATA ACCESSIBILITY.—The Secretary
13 shall make available on a publicly accessible website
14 of the Department of Labor any data collected as
15 part of the evaluation under this subsection. Such
16 data shall be made available in an aggregated for-
17 mat that does not reveal personally identifiable in-
18 formation and that ensures compliance with relevant
19 Federal laws, including section 444 of the General
20 Education Provisions Act (commonly known as the
21 ‘Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of
22 1974’) (20 U.S.C. 1232g).

23 “(5) PUBLICATION AND REPORTING OF EVAL-
24 UATION FINDINGS.—The Secretary (acting through
25 the Chief Evaluation Officer) shall—

1 “(A) in accordance with the timeline deter-
2 mined to be appropriate by the Chief Evalua-
3 tion Officer, publish an interim report on the
4 preliminary results of the evaluation conducted
5 under this subsection;

6 “(B) not later than 60 days after the date
7 on which the evaluation is completed under this
8 subsection, submit to the Committee on Health,
9 Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate
10 and the Committee on Education and Work-
11 force of the House of Representatives a report
12 on such evaluation; and

13 “(C) not later than 90 days after such
14 completion date, publish and make the results
15 of such evaluation available on a publicly acces-
16 sible website of the Department of Labor.

17 “(h) ANNUAL REPORTS.—The Secretary shall make
18 available on a publicly accessible website of the Depart-
19 ment of Labor, in transparent, linked, open, and inter-
20 operable data formats, the following information:

21 “(1) The performance of each eligible institu-
22 tion receiving a grant under this section on the ca-
23 pacity-building performance indicator set forth
24 under subsection (f)(1)(B).

1 “(2) The performance of each eligible institu-
 2 tion receiving a grant under this section on the
 3 workforce development participant outcome perform-
 4 ance indicators set forth under subsection (f)(1)(C).

5 “(3) The number of individuals enrolled in
 6 workforce development programs funded with a
 7 grant under this section.

8 “(i) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

9 “(1) CHIEF EVALUATION OFFICER.—The term
 10 ‘Chief Evaluation Officer’ means the head of the
 11 independent evaluation office located in the Office of
 12 the Assistant Secretary for Policy of the Department
 13 of Labor.

14 “(2) COMMUNITY COLLEGE.—The term ‘com-
 15 munity college’ means—

16 “(A) a public institution of higher edu-
 17 cation (as defined in section 101(a) of the
 18 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
 19 1001(a))), at which—

20 “(i) the highest degree awarded is an
 21 associate degree; or

22 “(ii) an associate degree is the most
 23 frequently awarded degree;

24 “(B) a branch campus of a 4-year public
 25 institution of higher education (as defined in

1 section 101 of the Higher Education Act of
2 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001)), if, at such branch
3 campus—

4 “(i) the highest degree awarded is an
5 associate degree; or

6 “(ii) an associate degree is the most
7 frequently awarded degree;

8 “(C) a 2-year Tribal College or University
9 (as defined in section 316(b)(3) of the Higher
10 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
11 1059c(b)(3))); or

12 “(D) a degree-granting Tribal College or
13 University (as defined in section 316(b)(3) of
14 the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
15 1059c(b)(3))) at which—

16 “(i) the highest degree awarded is an
17 associate degree; or

18 “(ii) an associate degree is the most
19 frequently awarded degree.

20 “(3) ELIGIBLE INSTITUTION.—The term ‘eligi-
21 ble institution’ means—

22 “(A) a community college;

23 “(B) a postsecondary vocational institution
24 (as defined in section 102(c) of the Higher
25 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1002(c))); or

1 “(C) a consortium of such colleges or insti-
 2 tutions.

3 “(j) SUPPLEMENT NOT SUPPLANT.—Funds made
 4 available under this section shall be used to supplement,
 5 and not supplant, other Federal, State, and local public
 6 funds made available for carrying out the activities de-
 7 scribed in this section.”.

8 **SEC. 3. TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

9 The table of contents in section 1(b) of the Workforce
 10 Innovation and Opportunity Act is amended by striking
 11 the item relating to section 172 and inserting the fol-
 12 lowing:

“Sec. 172. Strengthening community colleges workforce development grants
 program.

“Sec. 173. Authorization of appropriations.”.

