

CareerEdge Leaders Push for Pell Expansion

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Government

BY JACOB OGLES SRQ DAILY FRESHLY SQUEEZED CONTENT EVERY MORNING THURSDAY FEB 16, 2017



Executives with the CareerEdge Funders Collaborative recently traveled to Capitol Hill to advocate for improved access to grants for continuing education. Leaders remain hopeful that the cause will receive bipartisan support this year in Washington, DC. Deborah Chapman, program director for the collaborative, says the education grants provide a critical resource for skilled workers looking to improve their job prospects through continued education. “What we always look at is the highest growth industries with the best career laddering opportunities,” she says.

Pell grants, created through the Higher Education Act of 1965, provide federal subsidies to students with financial need who are pursuing higher education but have not yet earned a bachelor’s degree. And while the funding gets the most attention for its availability to students just out of high school, Chapman says many fail to realize it can also be used by adults seeking further schooling. However, limits on the available programs that can be funded by Pell grants mean not as many students in fields like nursing can take advantage of the offer, even though the fund for the grants currently runs at a surplus.

Chapman traveled to the nation's capitol representing CareerEdge as part of the National Skills Coalition, which has stressed that the greatest job opportunities in the nation right now are in the "middle skills" workforce, one that requires more training than a high school diploma but do not require a bachelor's or graduate degree. She notes that in Florida, the highest demand for workers is in medical-related fields like certified nursing assistants or surgical technicians. CareerEdge recently hosted a planning meeting where Booker Middle School Resource Center Associate Leroy Butler reported a waitlist of 70 people interested in a certified nursing program, even though the spring class can only accommodate 12 students. Chapman says that shows demand exists for funding so that students can take certification classes in nursing. CareerEdge also hosts programs in IT, construction and automotive maintenance.

The US Senate also has legislation under consideration to expand Pell grant funding to cover skills-based training programs. Chapman would like to see similar language filed in the House. In DC, she met with 11 House members from across the state, including Sarasota Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Sarasota, along with regional leaders including Tampa Bay area Democrats Kathy Castor and Charlie Crist and Republican Gus Bilirakis. "We have also reached out to Sens. Marco Rubio and Bill Nelson," she says, referencing the Republican and Democrat representing the state in the Senate, "and they have a great interest in moving this forward."

Photo courtesy CareerEdge: US Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-New Port Richey, meets with Deborah Chapman of CareerEdge Funders Collaborative.