



Letter of Support for H.R. 6585, the Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act

February 26, 2024

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of LeadingAge’s provider members and the older adults they serve, I urge you to support the Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act (H.R. 6585), which is scheduled for a vote under suspension the week of February 26, 2024. The Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act will substantively increase access for people with low incomes to high quality, short-term post-secondary education, opening pathways to fulfilling jobs with family-sustaining wages in the field long-term care.

LeadingAge represents more than 5,400 nonprofit and mission-driven aging services providers and other organizations that touch millions of lives every day. Alongside our members and 36 partners in 41 states, we use advocacy, education, applied research, and community-building to make America a better place to grow old. Our membership encompasses the entire continuum of aging services, including skilled nursing, assisted living, memory care, affordable housing, retirement communities, adult day programs, community-based services, hospice, and home-based care. We bring together the most inventive minds in the field to lead and innovate solutions that support older adults wherever they call home.

The U.S. Healthcare system is navigating a new and unfamiliar landscape in the wake of the Covid-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE). While shortages were projected prior to the pandemic, they have reached a crisis point in its wake, particularly for Direct Care Workers (DCW). DCWs, including Certified Nursing Assistants, Home Health Aides, and Personal Care Aides, provide skilled support to older adults across the care continuum in settings like skilled nursing, assisted living, home care, adult day, and hospice. While having rebounded some over the last two years, the nursing and residential care workforce alone had 136,000 fewer workers in January 2024 compared to February 2020.¹ The demand for direct care workers is high and is only expected to increase as our population ages.

More than 60% of DCWs are people of color and nine in 10 of them are women.² These skilled care providers often entered the field of aging services through high-quality, short term training programs lasting less than the current fifteen weeks, required for eligibility in the Pell Grant program. The current fifteen-week requirement excludes many low-income students from training programs that are well suited to equip them with the skills they need for a lifetime of success. Enactment of the Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act would give more people access to the training necessary to fill critical jobs while preserving quality of care.

The Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act would provide DCW students with a bridge to economic sustainability for generations of Direct Care Workers. Lowering the required length of training required to access the Pell Grant will open a world of employment opportunities and financial empowerment to low-income

¹ <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/CEU6562300001>

² Direct Care Workers in the United States: Key Facts (2022). PHI. Retrieved February 23, 2024, from <https://www.phinational.org/resource/direct-care-workers-in-the-united-states-key-facts-3/>

Americans while providing a critical pipeline of care providers that are well trained and prepared to meet the needs of older adults and their families without shouldering them with debt that may follow them for years.

On behalf of the 5,400 mission-driven providers that work with older adults and their families to provide dignified quality care and services, I urge you to vote “yes” on The Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act.

Thank you for your consideration. Please reach out to Nicole Howell, nhowell@leadingage.org with any questions or to discuss issues related to the direct care workforce.

Sincerely,

Katie Smith Sloan
President & CEO