



Letter sent to House and Senate Appropriations Committee

April 11, 2016

Dear Legislator:

The Michigan League for Public Policy urges you to support funding for the reinstatement of the Part-Time Independent Student Grant, which assists older students, in the Fiscal Year 2017 budget. Funding for this grant was eliminated from the Higher Education budget in 2010, leaving individuals who have been out of high school for 10 years with no financial aid to use at a community college or public university. After several years of not funding this grant, the governor included \$6 million in the Community Colleges budget for Fiscal Year 2016, to be used only at community colleges. Funding was passed by both legislative chambers but was removed by the conference committee.

Reinstating the Part-Time Independent Student Grant is important for individuals and for the workforce as a whole. For decades, many Michigan residents were able to become employed in the manufacturing sector immediately after high school, acquire valuable skills on the job, earn a livable wage and benefits with which to support their families, and retire with a pension. Today, however, to be hired in a career-track job, most workers are expected to already possess occupational skills and a credential such as a degree, license or certificate attained at a community college or university.

Many workers over 30 years old make the decision to get a postsecondary credential in order to regain employment after a layoff or to move out of low-paying work. While state financial aid helps many students of traditional college age, there are no state grants to help students attend public community colleges or universities if they have been out of high school for more than 10 years. Of the three existing grant programs, the Tuition Incentive Program and the Michigan Competitive Scholarship explicitly exclude such individuals from eligibility, and the Michigan Tuition Grant is available only to those attending a private, not-for-profit institution.

In addition, none of the three current grant programs are available to students enrolled less than half time or who are in short-term occupational programs. Older students must often go less than half time or enroll in a short-term program due to work and family needs. Not having financial aid for less than half time may lead some students to take on more classes than they can handle and jeopardize their ability to succeed.

The Michigan League for Public Policy urges you to support putting \$6 million in funding for the Part-Time Independent Student Grant back into the budget. **This would be a good investment in Michigan's workforce and help employers find the skilled workers that they need, which are both keys to a vibrant economy.**

Sincerely,

Gilda Z. Jacobs
President and CEO

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