

April 14, 1999

To the Editor:

As trustees of Parkland College, we recently went to Washington, D.C., to meet with U.S. Representative Tom Ewing, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, and U.S. Senator Peter G. Fitzgerald.

We encouraged them to:

1. Increase Federal Pell Grant funding to ensure equitable access to postsecondary education and training for financially needy students. Last year, the Pell program provided 1,642 low-income Parkland students nearly \$2.6 million in assistance.
2. Make permanent Section 127 of the Internal Revenue Code, which allows individuals to receive up to \$5,250 in tax-free, employer-provided educational assistance.
3. Increase funding for the Strengthening Institutions Program of the Higher Education Act, which assists community colleges that serve large numbers of disadvantaged and traditionally underserved individuals.
4. Remove burdens imposed on community colleges by repealing the statutory reporting requirements for the Hope Scholarship and Lifetime Learning tax credits. This year Parkland spent over \$15,000 to meet compliance requirements.

While in Washington, we learned that there is strong bipartisan congressional support for Illinois community colleges. Illinois boasts the third largest community college enrollment in the U.S. When all credit and non-credit courses, workshops, and public service activities are included, Illinois community colleges serve 1 million people each year - or one out of every 11 Illinois residents. Community colleges make a definite impact in Illinois.

This nation must maintain a commitment to access to post-secondary education and job training opportunities. We encourage Congress not to lose sight of one of the critical factors in making this country grow and be productive: an educated and skilled population.

Parkland College is doing its part at the local level. Congress must fulfill its role and maintain a federal funding commitment for higher education access. If you agree, please contact Rep. Ewing (202/225-2371), Senator Durbin (202/224-2152), and Senator Fitzgerald (202/224-2854), and ask for their support.

Sincerely,

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