



FIGHTING for PENNSYLVANIA FAMILIES

The CREATE Graduates Act

U.S. Senator Bob Casey

In today's tough economic environment, an associate degree is a valuable tool that can help graduates compete for jobs, earn higher wages and build brighter futures. Associate degree holders out earn their peers with some college experience by \$100,000 over a lifetime, and earn \$400,000 more than those with only high school diplomas. Thousands of students across Pennsylvania and the United States have completed all the requirements for an associate degree but never receive them, leaving them without these valuable credentials and often saddled with debt.

Each year, thousands of community college students transfer to four-year institutions before receiving a degree. These students complete additional courses at those institutions, which if taken at a community college, would have earned them an associate degree. However, if these students leave the university before graduation for any number of reasons – to start a job, care for family, serve in the military, or because they could no longer afford the cost – they are left with nothing to show for their hard work, even though they have fulfilled the requirements for a degree. Without a degree, these individuals are less likely to secure employment and earn less over their lifetime than their peers.

The Correctly Recognizing Educational Achievements to Empower (CREATE) Graduates Act will help hardworking Americans receive the degrees that they have already earned by creating incentives for institutions of higher education to establish “reverse transfer” programs, or initiatives to transfer back credits from a four-year institution to the community college where a student without a degree was initially enrolled. As a result, this bill will allow eligible students to obtain the associate degree that they have earned and, consequently, be more competitive when they enter the job market and ready to succeed.

The bill awards competitive grants to states to help institutions identify and reach out to students who have a combination of credits from their community college and four-year institution that may have completed the requirements for an associate degree but have never received one. Specifically, the CREATE Graduates Act will increase degree attainment by competitively awarding grants to states to work with institutions of higher education to:

- Identify students who have accumulated enough credits to earn an associate degree, but have not received one;
- Award associate degrees to those students upon the successful completion of a degree audits that verifies the fulfillment of the requirements for an associate degree; and
- Provide outreach to students within 12 credits of obtaining an associate degree to proactively provide information on the next steps to complete that degree, including financial aid options.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 100 occupations require an associate degree or postsecondary non-degree credential. Employment in these occupations is projected to grow significantly over the next decade. For example, employment in occupations requiring an associate degree is expected to grow at a rate twice that of occupations only requiring a high school diploma.

In this way, an associate degree will enable students to capitalize on these trends and obtain a level of education and training that will position them to succeed in today's economy.

In fact, reverse transfer programs have already enabled thousands of students to obtain their associate degree in numerous states, including Pennsylvania, Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Washington and West Virginia.

Supporting Organizations:

American Council on Education, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, American Association of Community Colleges, Association of American Universities, National Association for College Admission Counseling, National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, New America's Higher Education Program, The Institute for College Access and Success, Institute for Higher Education Policy, Third Way, The Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges, The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association