



INDIANA
COMMUNITY ACTION
POVERTY INSTITUTE
Research and Public Policy

Testimony before the Senate Education Committee

SB 161

Jan 7, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Raatz and members of the committee. My name is Erin Macey, and I am Director of the Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute and coordinator of the Indiana Skills2Compete Coalition, which brings together stakeholders with the aim of creating education and training opportunities in alignment with the needs of employers, offering more Hoosiers an opportunity to secure high-wage, family-sustaining jobs. I appreciate Senators Goode and Qaddoura for serving as liaisons from this body to the coalition, and the conversations we're able to have about upskilling.

I'm here today representing the Institute, which is a program of the Indiana Community Action Association. Indiana's 21 Community Action Agencies serves all 92 counties. While we serve Hoosiers from infants to seniors, collectively our network sees approximately 150,000 working-age adults annually who are experiencing financial hardship, many of whom have a high school diploma or less.

We are excited about Workforce Pell, which holds promise to enable Hoosiers to quickly build in-demand skills and unlock access to good jobs.

What we hear from Hoosiers is that cost and lack of wrap-around supports like childcare are barriers to accessing and persisting in training programs. Discerning what's a quality program and what's a scam matters to them, too. Hoosiers want to know that their efforts will pay off.

For this reason, we especially appreciate the emphasis on data collection that can speak to the quality of training programs. We hope that Hoosiers who will ultimately be the end-users of Workforce Pell are engaged as the implementation progresses, and that DWD is adequately resourced to take on these responsibilities and to ensure widespread access to information about these new options and how to evaluate what might be a good fit.

More broadly, we also want to urge this body to remain mindful that wrap-around supports are a necessary part of successfully completing training programs. Providing the temporary support necessary to help a Hoosier meet basic needs while upskilling and getting on a path to a family-sustaining job is a worthwhile investment. That means investing in programs like the Unemployment Insurance Skills Training Pilot Program passed last session but put on hold due to funding concerns, and making sure people across the state can access affordable childcare options.

Again, we look forward to the opportunity to work in partnership with you and other stakeholders to make workforce pell a success in Indiana.