

From the community CT Community College Dean Represents Connecticut on Capitol Hill



Peltier (left) and Shelankas are shown before one of their meetings outside Sen. Richard Blumenthal's office on Capitol Hill. (Posted by mlamar, Community Contributor)

By **Community Contributor mlamar**

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Eileen Peltier, dean of workforce development and continuing education at Asnuntuck and Tunxis Community Colleges, traveled to Capitol Hill in December to represent Connecticut as part of a "fly-in" organized by Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships.

Peltier joined Asnuntuck Community College instructor and small business owner Lisa Shelankas for meetings with staff from the offices of Sens. Chris Murphy and Richard Blumenthal, and Reps. **Joe Courtney** and **Rosa DeLauro**, to discuss the importance of modernizing federal financial aid for students, and to urge the expansion of funding for career and technical education through the Perkins Act.

Peltier and Shelankas discussed how to make Pell Grants work better for businesses and job seekers, and requested support for the expansion of eligibility to include short-term occupational training that leads to industry-recognized credentials and employment in areas that are in-demand.

"This was a great opportunity to talk about Connecticut's important workforce development initiatives and the need to provide the state's residents with access to funding for short-term training programs that will launch their careers and pay family-sustaining wages," said Peltier. "Students who are training for in-demand health careers and other skilled professions should have the same access to Pell Grants to pay for their training as our credit students."

Some of the Asnuntuck and Tunxis programs that may be eligible if legislation passes include Central Sterile Processing Technician, Certified Nurse Aide, Certified Professional Medical Coder, Certified Inpatient Coder, Patient Care Technician, Medical Administrative Assistant, Medical Assistant, Ophthalmic Assistant, Patient Care Technician, Pharmacy Technician, Phlebotomy Technician, and Veterinary Assistant.

Peltier also asked for support of the expansion of Perkins funding to \$1.6 billion, the 2006 level of funding. Perkins funds are used for students who are enrolled in career and technical education programs, which state community colleges are able to access through grants to supplement program costs. Asnuntuck and Tunxis use these funds for instruction, expanding the use of technology in the classroom, curriculum development, and materials in some programs, including those that connect high school students with college through community college courses at their high schools.

Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships (BLU) is composed of employers from a range of industries across the United States concerned about our nation's skills gap, and in promoting policy making that contributes to American workforce investment and training. According to its website, BLU provides a common platform from which business leaders can jointly communicate to national policymakers, the media and public about industry-based strategies they've developed which could serve as models for a more comprehensive national skills policy. BLU is a national partner of National Skills Coalition, collaborating to shape and advance policy reforms at the federal and state level.

With more than 3,200 members, National Skills Coalition is governed by a board of directors drawn from business, labor, community-based organizations, the public workforce system, and community colleges, including the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities.

Combined, Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield and Tunxis Community College in Farmington serve over 15,000 credit and continuing education students each year, 5,000 of which are enrolled in short-term health certification programs and courses that are not offered for college credit and are ineligible for Pell Grants. Both colleges are currently accepting registrations for spring semester. For more information on programs at Asnuntuck, call 860.253.3010 or visit asnuntuck.edu. For information on Tunxis, call 860.773.1490, or visit tunxis.edu.

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