

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 948:
Higher Education – Part-Time Grant Program – Eligibility**

TO: Hon. Sheila Hixson, Chair, and members of the House Ways and Means
Committee
FROM: Melissa Broome, Senior Policy Advocate
DATE: March 4, 2009

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support HB 948 as a means to increase access to post-secondary education for non-traditional students wishing to upgrade their skills.

Over 1.3 million working-age Marylanders lack a college degree. In addition, half of Maryland college students are over the age of 25, and nearly half of all students are enrolled part-time. State policies often overlook these non-traditional students, and are biased toward students transitioning directly from high school to full-time college enrollment.

More education could help many of these workers move into high-demand, better-paying jobs but major barriers stand in the way. Many cannot find enough financial assistance in order to pay for it. The Part-Time Grant Program is Maryland's primary need-based program for non-traditional students. With awards of up to \$2,000 per academic year, it can help close the gap for working adults, but students must be taking between six and eleven credits in order to apply. Those enrolled less than half time are ineligible.

Eligibility for the Part-Time Grant Program should be expanded to include students taking between three and eleven credits per semester. With more than half of community college students nationwide working more than 20 hours per week, many can only manage one class – or three credits – per semester.

This minor change in eligibility will help ensure that more students have a chance at receiving financial aid. Such a fix is especially worthwhile during these times of economic recession when many are pressed to enhance their skills and make themselves more valuable in the market. For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report of HB 948.