

Laurel College Center received a symbolic check Monday for \$198,400 to support its nursing and allied health students programs.

U.S. Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Dist.5-Md.) of Mechanicsville secured the money in the federal Omnibus Appropriations Act passed by Congress late in 2004.

The center is a partnership between Prince George's and Howard community colleges, the presidents of which joined Hoyer during a press conference April 25 to announce the funding.

"The success of Laurel College Center is a result of the commitment of both [colleges] to address an important unfulfilled need in the Northern Prince George's County/Laurel community," Hoyer said in a statement.

Established in 2001, the Laurel College Center provides a convenient campus for students from the two community colleges in the Laurel area. But both colleges combined have more than 100 students on a waiting list to enroll in their nursing programs. They are qualified but kept from enrolling partly because of the inadequacy of the lab facilities.

The new funding is helping to expand the facilities by building a new biology lab to teach biology, anatomy and physiology courses. The lab and courses will serve students in nursing, cardiovascular technology, paramedic/emergency medical technician and other programs that require health lab work.

The training enabled by this funding will also address a growing shortage of nurses across the state and country, officials said. An estimated national nursing shortage of 6 percent in 2000 is expected to reach 12 percent in 2010 and 29 percent by 2020, according to a 2002 report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Howard Community College President Mary Ellen Duncan said the school's "skyrocketing enrollment" shows that the Laurel center is meeting a definite need in the area.

"We are deeply grateful to Congressman Hoyer for providing the resources to expand our services," she added. "Not only will Laurel residents benefit, but Mr. Hoyer's support will help address critical workforce shortages in nursing and other careers that will provide better healthcare for us all."