

June 28, 2011

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
HELP Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi
Ranking Member
HELP Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Subcommittee on
Employment and Workplace Safety
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Employment and Workplace Safety
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Harkin, Enzi, Murray, and Isakson:

We are writing to commend the Committee for its bipartisan effort to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). We support the bill moving forward through Committee markup and look forward to working with Committee to make further improvements to this bipartisan bill as it continues to move through the legislative process.

Last year, more than 8 million individuals received training and other employment services funded under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act—a 234 percent increase in participation rates in just two years—while many millions more received services or supports through the Wagner-Peyser Employment Services, Adult Education and Family Literacy, and Vocational Rehabilitation programs.

Today, 13.9 million U.S. workers are unemployed, with nearly half of those workers unemployed for over six months, the highest rate of long term unemployment in recent history. Despite the success the workforce system has had in assisting workers in the current economy, the Workforce Investment Act was written in 1998, a time of 4% unemployment. It is vital for Congress to modernize the nation's workforce development system this year to ensure that individuals at all skill levels are able to obtain the training and education they need to get and keep jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency, while also ensuring that employers in high-growth and emerging industries are able to find qualified workers to fill current and projected job openings.

While the organizations signing this letter may not support every provision in the committee-drafted WIA reauthorization bill, we are all committed to seeing this program reauthorized. We know that some members of Congress have expressed concern about the effectiveness and efficiency of the current workforce development system, and we feel strongly that the best way to begin addressing these concerns is through the reauthorization process.

Failure to reauthorize this program will continue to leave federal job training programs vulnerable to funding cuts. Such cuts will not only lead to disruptions in services—including the likely closure of one-stop centers and training programs in communities across the country—but will impact the ability of our nation’s employers to find the skilled workers they need to fill immediate job openings and plan for future growth.

We urge the committee to continue to operate on a bipartisan basis to reauthorize WIA and ensure that our nation’s workers have the skills they need to get and keep a job, and that employers have access to the skilled workforce they need to compete in the global economy.

Sincerely,

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP)
Asian American Justice Center, Member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT)
Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs (AFOP)
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Coalition for Workforce Solutions (CWS)
Community Action Partnership
Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW)
Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)
Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL)
Insight Center for Community Economic Development
International Association of Jewish Vocational Services (IAJVS)
Jobs for the Future (JFF)
Legal Momentum
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)
National Association of Development Organizations (NADO)
National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB)
National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP)
The National Center on Family Homelessness
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE)
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
National Employment Law Project (NELP)
National Fund for Workforce Solutions (NFWS)
National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
National Network for Youth
National Network of Sector Partners
National Skills Coalition
National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN)

National Workforce Association (NWA)
National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC)
PHI – Quality Care *through* Quality Jobs
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
The Corps Network
USA Works!
U.S. Conference of Mayors
Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW)
Workforce Learning Strategies
Workforce Strategies Initiative, Aspen Institute
Workforce Strategy Center (WSC)
Working Poor Families Project