



THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

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May 16, 2024

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

On behalf of The U.S. Conference of Mayors, we write today to express our priorities for bi-partisan legislation reauthorizing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). With more than 9.5 million job openings in the U.S., but only 6.5 million unemployed workers, it is critically important that Congress reauthorize federally funded job training programs that work, and promote an agenda of smart, sustainable investments in the nation's workforce to put us on a solid path for economic growth. U.S. cities require a highly-skilled, trained workforce that can compete globally, and there is nothing more important than building successful programs that support individuals in our communities to develop skills for the jobs of the future.

Strong local workforce investment boards serve as important conveners for shaping and implementing local and regional workforce development strategies to grow our economy. There are countless examples of successes from cities across the nation of industries using WIOA-funded tools such as training subsidies, skills certifications, customized recruiting events and services, job-profiling and others to ensure that jobs are created – and stay – in our city's.

Accordingly, we want to emphasize the importance of protecting a strong local governance role in reauthorization, as well as maintaining a strong business majority on streamlined local boards. These elements are critical to the implementation of local and regional workforce development strategies and essential to growing our economy. As you well know, strong private-sector led local workforce investment boards serve as catalysts and conveners, bringing employers, educators, workforce development and economic development entities together to coordinate efforts and develop a comprehensive employment strategy.

We also urge you to draft reauthorization legislation which allows for maximum local flexibility to enrich the mix of workforce and adult education services, provides more flexible training options, and allows for transitional jobs strategies suited to disadvantaged jobseekers. Mayors hear every day from our business community — of every size and industry and across the country — that they face an unprecedented challenge finding skilled workers to fill their open jobs. Accordingly, our local workforce system must be nimble, innovative, responsive and ready to design the programs necessary to meet their needs. This cannot be accomplished with oppressive top-down oversight, cumbersome reporting and performance measures, or bureaucratic red-tape. The investments in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) which provided direct and flexible relief to cities to help rescue the country's economy during the COVID-19 crisis serve as a reminder that mayors can and will spend federal dollars wisely and with due diligence. Mayors know best how to solve

their community problems and meet community needs. WIOA reauthorization should ensure that mayors can do the same to meet their business needs.

A successful workforce system is also built on a foundation with clear roles and responsibilities for both states and localities, and mayors believe that this clarity is critical to success in reauthorization. Accordingly, while we appreciate the House Education and the Workforce Committee's bi-partisan efforts to renew and improve the nation's workforce system by advancing their new reauthorization bill – A Stronger Workforce for America Act (ASWA) — we have several significant concerns with the legislation as follows:

Local Workforce Area Redesignation Requirements

Halfway through the legislation's reauthorization period in ASWA, governors are directed to start a redesignation process for local workforce development areas (LDWAs). The bill provides three options:

1. Governors can propose to maintain existing LDWAs; or
2. Governors can propose new designations which require approval from all local workforce boards effect the change; or
3. Even with opposition from a majority of the local workforce development boards (LWDBs), a third option of reducing local workforce areas into single statewide areas remains. This provision circumvents the will of mayors, jobseekers and employers and eliminates local control.

The nation's mayors urge you to maintain the current local area designation language as it appears in WIOA.

New Fifty Percent Training Mandate for Adult and Dislocated Worker Funding

ASWA mandates that all local workforce boards spend at least 50% of their Adult and Dislocated Worker funds on training. The legislation narrowly defines "training" and does not include supportive or wraparound services toward the mandate. This removes local flexibility to innovate and does not allow workforce boards to design services to meet specific local needs, such as direct financial support for childcare or transportation, and will also lead to a reduction in other critical services.

The nation's mayors urge you to exclude the proposed new mandate for a 50% minimum expenditure on training, so the system can adequately meet the needs of businesses and jobseekers.

Potential Increased State Set-Aside to 25% of Total WIOA Allocations

ASWA includes language which allows for the creation of a new "Critical Industries Fund"— up to 10% of a state's allocation. This new fund, in addition to the existing Governors Reserve Fund of 15%, potentially permits a total state-level set aside of 25%, further reducing the local resources remaining to deliver the increased training services newly mandated in ASWA. Further, the legislation allows the use of other federal funding, including the governor's existing 15% reserve, to be used to meet the state's matching requirement for the creation of the Critical Industries Fund. This further erodes the ability of WIOA to leverage additional state funding for training opportunities in local areas.

The nation's mayors urge you to exclude the proposed new 10% increase in the state set-aside.

As economic stewards of cities, mayors know that helping employers secure the highly-skilled workforce they need is not a partisan issue, and we greatly appreciate your bi-partisan and bi-cameral cooperation to move this critical legislation forward. Federal workforce and adult education programs help millions of Americans find jobs, prepare for work and build the skills required for emerging employment opportunities, and they are of paramount importance as we work to secure the nation's continued economic growth.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors stands ready to work with you as you craft this critical legislation to ensure that the nation's workers have the necessary skills, and that employers have access to the skilled workforce they need, to compete in the 21st century economy.

Sincerely,

Kate Gallego
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Chair, USCM Jobs, Education
and Workforce Standing
Committee

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