Workforce Investment Act

Priorities for Reauthorization

February 2010

Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I
(*Workforce Investment Systems for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth)*

Train More Workers for the 21st-Century Economy

Clarify that the focus of the program should be on the provision of high quality education, training and related services which lead to a vocational certificate, industry-recognized credential, or degree and provide individuals with the necessary skills and experience to access jobs that pay family supporting wages and have advancement potential.

- **Remove Barriers to Training.** Remove federally defined "Sequence of Services," so local WIA systems can offer services (core, intensive, training) in any order or combination, as required by the individual job-seeker and local market conditions.
- **Encourage Greater Training Investment.** Establish a required percentage (consistent with current averages) of allocated WIA formula dollars that must be spent by states and localities on worker services, with an emphasis on training. Allow a portion of that base percentage to be achieved by leveraging new public or private-sector dollars for a portion of that service provision, and clarify that WIA funds can be used in conjunction with Pell grants. Allow local areas the flexibility to provide training through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) or contract training, as appropriate.
- **Get Every Possible Worker a Credential that Can Land a Skilled Job.** Establish general standards for the currently undefined "credential" measure, so that local areas report on the range of credentials achieved through WIA-funded training, including the number that are industry-recognized, or that fill "middle-skill" occupations requiring some minimum level of training and work experience (e.g., at least 6-12 months). Set national goals in this area, to assess how well WIA is preparing the U.S. workforce for the 21st-century global economy.

Invest in Sector Partnerships and Workforce Research and Development

- **Establish and Fund Sector Partnerships.** Incorporate the "Strengthening Employment Clusters to Organize Regional Success (SECTORS) Act" (S777/HR 1855) into reauthorizing legislation. The SECTORS Act creates a congressionally authorized, monitored and separately funded program that will help local industries grow and re-tool their future workforces. Ensure this investment stream is a permanent part of WIA, and is structured to complement existing WIA services and infrastructure.

Improve the Stability and Efficiency of Labor Exchange Infrastructure

- **Establish a Separate Budget Line for One-Stop Infrastructure**. Establish an annually reauthorized funding stream, from within current WIA funding, specifically for One-Stop operations and Workforce Investment Board (WIB) oversight. Make this funding stable, but also set it according to appropriate targets for spending, given the need to expand training investments.
- **Seek Coordination between Employment Services (ES) and One-Stops.** Establish means whereby ES and One-Stop services can be more easily coordinated at the local level.

Use Performance Measures to Improve Program Coordination

- **Use the Right Common Measures.** Adopt common measures across federally funded programs with a workforce development goal. Measures should track placement, retention and earnings—but not in a way that discourages service to low-wage or hard-to-serve clients (e.g., average / median earnings vs. earnings gains). Measures should also be adopted for the range and number of skill credentials achieved through WIA-funded training. Develop and, over time, implement a system of shared accountability across workforce and other education and training programs.
- **Take into Account Local Market Conditions.** Allow local areas the flexibility to adjust negotiated performance levels according to changing local economic conditions.
- **Remove Disincentives for Serving the Disadvantaged.** Allow approaches such as tiered performance measures, regression models (per JTPA), and performance incentives for local areas or providers that focus some of their attention on serving individuals with significant barriers to employment (defined as "special populations" in current law), so those local providers / areas will not be penalized for lower outcomes or higher costs associated with such efforts.

Allow Flexibility in Identifying WIA-qualified Education and Training Providers (ETP)

- **State Standards for ETP.** Allow states to establish their own "Eligible Training Provider" criteria, without relaxing the rigorous collection of outcome data to ensure workers are being adequately served by individual programs.
- **No Federally Defined Preferred Providers.** Reject efforts to federally designate a particular type of education / training provider as categorically better than another, or for special allowances for contracting, etc. Allow state and localities the flexibility to choose their training provider based on performance, not federal designation.

Ensure Public Review and Comment on WIA Plans

- **Public Review of Plans.** Require a public review, comment and response period for all state and local WIA plans before being submitted to designated agency.

Workforce Investment Act Title II (*Adult Education and Family Literacy Act*)

Train More Workers for the 21st-Century Economy

- **Increase the Rate at Which Students Attain Career and Postsecondary Success.** Explicitly allow that each of the three required local activities funded by Title II—Adult education and literacy services (including workplace literacy services), Family literacy services, and English literacy services—to be provided before or in combination with work or postsecondary education and training and recognize that program strategies can include, but are not limited to, approaches that integrate basic skills and postsecondary education and training content or which may dual or concurrently enroll students in basic skills and postsecondary education and training.
- **Support Integrated Learning Models.** Research suggests such approaches are more effective than the traditional, solely sequential, academic approach in helping students earn postsecondary credentials. Mandate that a portion of Federally funded Title II state grants be used for seeding and scaling up approaches that integrate basic skills and postsecondary education and training or which dual or concurrently enroll students in basic skills and postsecondary education and training. Expand work-based literacy and increase access in other ways—for example, through flexible delivery modes, including weekend, compressed, or accelerated formats, and technology-based strategies—to adult education for lower-skilled incumbent workers. Develop separate performance measures for these programs, rather than holding them accountable for the current adult education performance measures, and conduct an evaluation of the impact of integrated programs on the rate at which students attain career and postsecondary success.

Use the Right Performance Measures

- **Focus Reporting on Increasing the Rate at Which all Students Attain Career and Postsecondary Success.** Ensure that federal adult education accountability is focused on objective, measurable, evidence-based indicators of student progress toward credentials of value in the labor market and success in the labor market.
- **Measure all Core Outcomes for all Title II Participants.** Measure educational gains, entered employment, retained employment, receipt of secondary school diploma or GED, and entered postsecondary education or training for all Title II participants instead of tracking outcomes only for students who report a goal related to the measure. Measure postsecondary success (rather than enrollment), such as completing the equivalent of one semester of occupational training or college-level math or English, or earning a credential of demonstrated value in the labor market.

Align Systems to Ease Joint Basic Skills and Occupational Training and Promote Career Pathways

- **Mandate Co-Enrollment Targets**. During PY 2007, only 0.2 percent of WIA exiters from the WIA Title I Adult program were co-enrolled in adult education. Require states to promote

closer connections between Titles I and II and to set targets that steadily increase over time the percentage of participants co-enrolled in WIA Titles I and II. Help Title II participants gain access to career counseling, job placement, and support services by increasing co-enrollment of these individuals in Title I programs.

- **Develop Flexible Funding Mechanisms.** Training services under Title I are primarily funded through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), while Title II adult education services are generally funded under contracts with providers. This likely complicates efforts to fund programs that might otherwise provide both services. Federal policy should permit local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to merge Title I and Title II funding to support dual-service programs.
- **Encourage Interagency Coordination.** Title I job training services are implemented through state workforce development systems (including state and local WIBs), while Title II services are generally implemented on the local level by state and local educational and community-based entities. Provide new, designated Federal funding for "State Policy Leadership Grants" to support systemic state policy change at the agency level across adult education and postsecondary education and training programs and align services and improve outcomes across workforce development, postsecondary education, and adult education / English as a Second Language in a career pathway framework. Grants should be administered by new, cross-agency taskforce or center focused on workforce education and training.
- **Support Career Pathways Alignment and Development**. Many states are adopting "career pathways" strategies that offer adults ongoing basic skills and postsecondary occupational training while they are employed, with prescribed pathways that lead to educational credentials and allow advancement within particular industries. Provide new, designated Federal funding for "Career Pathways Planning and Implementation Grants" to support local implementation of new policies and practices that are aimed at increasing student success across a wide range of education and training partners in a career pathway.
- **Create a Cross-Agency Taskforce or Center.** Focused on workforce education and training, the taskforce or center would be tasked with: looking across federal agencies and programs to determine how to best promote the attainment of workforce skills and educational credentials for all workers; administering the State Policy Leadership and the Career Pathways Planning and Implementation Grants; acting as a clearinghouse of best practices; providing technical assistance (TA) to states; and making recommendations across federal agencies for improvements to existing programs (these recommendations could be for legislation, executive order, waiver, etc.).

Invest in Adult Basic Education (ABE) for a 21st-Century Skills Guarantee

- **Increase Investments in ABE**. Nearly 88 million adults in the United States face at least one major educational barrier, and yet fewer than 3 million are served by the federally-funded adult education system each year due to limited resources. Congress should significantly increase the federal investment (and maintain the required state match) to ensure that workers have access to high quality adult basic education that will put them on the path toward achieving 21st-century skills.