



NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION

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September 3rd, 2021

Ms. Susan Rice
Director
Domestic Policy Council
The White House

Mr. Brian Deese
Director
National Economic Council
The White House

Dear Ms. Rice and Mr. Deese:

Happy Labor Day weekend! Thank you for all of the time you and the rest of NEC and DPC staff are putting in this weekend to help push President Biden's "build back better" plan across the finish line with Congress. Nothing could be more important for the working people of America.

I am writing to strongly encourage you to make sure that Congress fully funds both the President's proposed \$100 billion in workforce training (as outlined in the original American Jobs Plan) and the \$109 billion free community college proposal (as outlined in the original American Families Plan). We understand that, because Congress' current \$3.5 trillion budget package is smaller than the President's original proposal, the White House is going to have to recommend adjustments to the original budget lines in the Build Back Better plan. **I am imploring you not to see the workforce training and community college proposals as duplicative, such that the workforce training proposal could be dramatically cut in order to preserve the community college plan.** To serve the greatest diversity of people impacted by this pandemic, and to effectively engage a range of businesses and industries, **President Biden needs both of these proposals fully funded, or significant numbers of workers and businesses will be left out of this economic recovery.**

I'm enclosing for you two letters that recently were sent to the Hill—one co-signed by [120 national and local business leaders](#), the other [co-signed by over 500](#) workforce boards, labor-management partnerships, community college and education advocates and community organizations—imploring Congress not to cut anything from the \$100 billion in workforce training investments that President Biden called for in his original infrastructure proposal. These organizations and businesses recognize how vital these investments in training are going to be to ensure those most impacted by this pandemic can access the skilled jobs created by the Build Back Better plan.

Anecdotally, we have similarly heard from a range of state and local elected officials about how important they see these workforce investments as complements to community college expansion. In fact, two members of the President's own cabinet—[former Mayor and now Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh](#), and **former Governor and now Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo**—have been extremely effective at publicly making the case for this \$100 billion training investment, informed by their own experiences in training people for careers in local industries that could drive inclusive economic growth.

Our Coalition is thrilled with the President's call to make community college more accessible to all Americans, including working people who want to enroll in industry-connected certificate and degree programs. It is a potential game-changer for the future of higher education in this country, and we look forward to working with you to win its enactment and its effective execution.

However, it is important to recognize that there will be many working people in need of help during this recovery who are not academically ready, not able or not interested in enrolling in college as their initial path back into the labor market. Pre-apprenticeship programs that can diversify the pipeline of applicants for registered apprenticeships will not be based in community colleges, and even much of the training-related instruction during those apprenticeships will be provided in non-college settings. Young people who have not completed high school and are not of college age but who need employment will not benefit from free community college, and may in fact never become academically ready for college without the support of other training and youth development services offered through non-college programs. Recent immigrant workers—including those laid off from the contracting retail and hospitality sectors—will not have sufficient language skills to participate in college-level programming. In fact, there are tens of millions of U.S. workers today in the retail, hospitality, healthcare, construction and manufacturing sectors whose digital, reading and math skills are not at the level to allow them to meet basic community college entrance requirements. Nationally recognized labor-management partnerships and community-based organizations who have provided cutting edge training developed in concert with local industry would be left out the President's recovery effort if the final reconciliation package did not include them.

In addition, the best community colleges recognize that they often need fully funded and effective workforce partners in order to provide the best chances for success for their students seeking employment or career advancement . Small local employers who are interested in creating career opportunities for local residents but only hiring a few people a year are not operating at the kind of scale to warrant a local college's creation of a customized training program for that company. But sector partnerships of multiple small employers—created and funded through the workforce system—can both meet the immediate needs of those individual employers, and at the same time help that industry work with the local community college program to set up career pathways programming for the sector. Similarly, even the types of childcare, transportation, counseling and other support services called for in the American Families Plan for low-income community college students will often not be delivered by the college, but instead by local community and workforce organizations funded by systems outside higher education.

President Biden proposed a Build Back Better plan that offered multiple pathways for people most impacted by the pandemic to participate in our nation's economic recovery. Please make sure that both the workforce training and community college pathways offered by the President are equally and adequately funded by Congress in its final budget package.

I'd welcome the opportunity to provide whatever other information you might find useful as you assess these options. Till then, have a great Labor Day!

Sincerely,



Andy Van Kleunen
Chief Executive Officer

c.c., Pronita Gupta (DPC), Seth Harris (NEC)