

June 4, 2026

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cole, Chair Collins, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Vice Chair Murray:

As the economy changes, equipping workers and learners with the skills and knowledge employers need—now and in the future—is a national priority that warrants federal investment that is commensurate with the scale of this challenge. We write as representatives of organizations across workforce development boards, state and local governments, community and technical colleges, adult educators, labor and labor-management partnerships, community-based organizations, workers and businesses, we urge you to prioritize and strengthen investments in our nation's workforce development and education systems under the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and related agencies for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27).

The economy is beginning to show signs of slowing growth with a growing number of workers who are now on the sidelines. According to the March Jobs report, 17.7 million individuals are without a job, underemployed, or want a job but are not currently in the labor force, compared to only 6.9 million job openings—a troubling indication of growing slack in the labor market.¹ At the same time, increasing numbers of retired adults are returning to the workforce primarily to afford everyday living costs.² Yet even as more workers seek employment, 69% of American employers say they are struggling to find the skilled talent they need.³ As economic conditions continue to shift, workers will need access to education and training to transition into industries experiencing growth. Strong federal workforce and education investments are critical to meeting the demand of growing industries and helping workers adapt in times of economic uncertainty.

Yet the workers who need assistance the most continue to face inadequate access to the foundational skills and supports needed to succeed in today's labor market, primarily because federal investments addressing these challenges have not kept pace with growing need.

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Employment Situation — March 2025*, April 3, 2026, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary – February 2026*, March 31, 2026, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.nr0.htm>.

² Economic Policy Research Institute, *Are Older Workers a New Reserve Army of Labor?*, <https://www.economicpolicyresearch.org/research/are-older-workers-a-new-reserve-army-of-labor>

³ ManpowerGroup, *2026 Global Talent Shortage* (Milwaukee: ManpowerGroup, 2026), <https://www.manpowergroup.com/en/insights/2026-global-talent-shortage>.

Approximately 28% of U.S. adults have low literacy proficiency, and 34% have low numeracy proficiency.⁴ Meanwhile, 92% of jobs require digital skills, yet nearly one-third of U.S. adults lack the foundational digital skills.⁵ As technology, automation, and artificial intelligence continue to transform the economic landscape at an accelerating pace, the need for training, retraining, and upskilling will only grow – making accessible skills training, education, and wraparound supports essential not just for entering the workforce, but throughout workers' entire careers. Federal workforce and education investments can support the programs that build workers' digital skills and create career pathways for continuous learning and advancement.

Chronic underinvestment in the workforce system has prevented the public workforce system from reaching its full potential, which in turn has fueled a flawed narrative that these programs and systems—rather than a lack of resources behind them—are the problem to be solved. For too long, workforce development has been framed as a "second chance" system for people who have somehow "fallen short" in school or in work and levels of federal investment for the last two decades reflect this perspective. It is long past time to change the message and treat workforce and education programs as *first-choice* investments that unlock potential, expand opportunity and access, and equip workers and local businesses with the skills and talent they need to thrive in a rapidly changing economy.

Making that shift starts with strengthened federal investments in the nation's human capital. Yet, the United States presently lags significantly behind peer nations. To match the average level of investment among OECD countries, the U.S. would need to invest \$96 billion more annually in workforce development.⁶ Rather than closing that gap, the FY 2027 President's Budget proposes eliminating funding for key programs that support literacy, education and skills development for workers with barriers to employment including Adult Education, Senior Community Service Employment Program, and Job Corps. It also proposed consolidating 12 workforce programs, including WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth funding, into a single "Make America Skilled Again" block grant that would cut total funding by \$1.2 billion compared to what those programs collectively received in the most recent fiscal year. These programs are critical to providing access to skills training and education as well as the wraparound supports – including career navigation, transportation, childcare, and nutrition assistance – that make participation possible. Future funding levels should reflect actual needs of workers, businesses, and communities, rather than proposing to eliminate capacity at the moment it is needed most.

The American public understands what is at stake and supports federal investment in skills training. According to polling, 82% of voters support increased government funding for skills training programs including 91% of Democrats, 83% of Independents, and nearly three-quarters

⁴ OECD, *Survey of Adult Skills 2023: United States* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/survey-of-adults-skills-2023-country-notes_ab4f6b8c-en/united-states_427d6aac-en.html

⁵ National Skills Coalition, *Closing the Digital Skill Divide in the United States*, February 2025, https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/NSC-National_factsheet_digdivide.pdf.

⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Data Viewer, 2023, <https://data-viewer.oecd.org?chartId=0a1af3ae-8eae-411e-bc89-4c005a81265d>; and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Gross Domestic Product, Fourth Quarter and Year 2023 (Second Estimate), 2024, <https://www.bea.gov/news/2024/gross-domestic-product-fourth-quarter-and-year-2023-second-estimate>.

of Republicans.⁷ Support for workforce investments is a genuinely bipartisan issue and Congressional appropriations should reflect that.

In order to meet the needs of workers and employers alike, we call for the following specific actions for FY27 appropriations legislation:

- Provide at least a 10 percent increase above current levels for WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker, Apprenticeship, and other Department of Labor workforce programs.
- Fund WIOA Title I Youth Funding at \$1.14 billion to better support connecting Opportunity Youth to quality training and good jobs and include report language directing the Secretary of Labor to make competitive grants for subsidized summer and year-round employment opportunities targeted to opportunity youth or justice involved youth and those in high poverty areas under the Committee's demonstration authority under section 169 of WIOA.
- Preserve Adult Education and increase funding in FY27 to \$810 Million.
- Maintain the current maximum Pell Grant and address the funding shortfall to ensure resources are available as the new Workforce Pell program expands access to shorter-term, high-quality training and education. Pell Grants are a valuable tool to make education more affordable and accessible for those with the greatest financial need
- Restore funding for the Reentry Employment Opportunities Program to \$115 million.
- Increase funding for YouthBuild to \$130 million to better meet program demand.
- Restore Senior Community Services Employment Program funding to \$405 million.
- Increase funding for Career and Technical Education (CTE) State Grants by \$50 million.
- Fund Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants at \$75 million.
- Provide at least \$40 million for the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) and include report language that ensures future competitive awards intentionally connect with other statewide data initiatives to improve state and local workforce data infrastructure and ensure that the information generated by the public workforce system is more useable for workers, learners, employers, and policymakers to drive continuous improvement and informed-consumer choice.

Now is not the time to scale back investments in the programs that support education and training. We urge you to protect and expand funding through the FY2027 appropriations process to ensure workers can access the training they need, businesses can hire the skilled talent they require, and our economy can thrive. We appreciate your leadership and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:

A Better Balance
Advance CTE
Aeronautical Repair Station Association
Alianza for Opportunity

⁷ National Skills Coalition, *Public Perspectives: Top Findings Brief*, May 2024, https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/NSC_PublicPerspectives_TopFindings_Brief.pdf.

America Forward
American Association of Community Colleges
American YouthWorks
Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions
Association for Career and Technical Education
Association of Community College Trustees
Bridges From School to Work
Build Justly
Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)
COABE
Construction Trades Workforce Initiative
COOP Careers
Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
the Forum for Youth Investment
GRID Alternatives
Hire Heroes USA
iCouldBe.org
International Rescue Committee
Jane Addams Resource Corporation
JustLeadershipUSA
Labor Institute for Training, Inc.
Leap Fund
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
NAF
National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB)
National Association of Workforce Development Professionals
National Career Development Association
National Coalition for Aviation & Space Education
National Coalition for Literacy
National Coalition of Advanced Technology Centers (NCATC)
National Council on Aging
National Network for Youth
National Rehabilitation Association
National Skills Coalition
National Working Positive Coalition
National Youth Employment Coalition
Next Generation in Trucking Association
NTEN
Opportunity@Work
Per Scholas
Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors - National Association
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Skillspire
State Business Executives
StriveTogether
TESOL International Association
United States Workforce Associations
USI Insurance Services
YouthBuild Global

State and Local Organizations:

Access Community Action Agency
AccuRounds
Adirondack Executive Services
Advance Central PA
ANEW
Atlanta Center for Self Sufficiency
Avenues For Justice
Barry County Chamber and Economic Development Alliance
Bridgeport Group
California Adult Education Administrators Association
California Council for Adult Education
California EDGE Coalition
Calumet Area Industrial Commission
Campaign for Working CT
Can Code Communities
Capital Area Michigan Works!
Capital Region Workforce Development Board
Capital Talent Development Group
Capital Workforce Partners
Cayuga Cortland Workforce Development Board
Center for Caregiver Advancement
Chicago Jobs Council
Chicago Women in Trades
CIE Newcor Machine Tool & Gear
Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency
City Of Flint Police Department
CLC, Inc
Colorado Center on Law and Policy
Cooperative Home Care Associates
Creation Culture
Crispus Attucks YouthBuild Charter School
Cuyahoga County Job and Family Services
Delta Area Economic Opportunity Corporation
Digital Equity Learning Network
Domico Med-Device LLC
Dream Come True Foundation
EASTCONN
Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board (EWIB)
Easterseals Redwood
Effective Leadership Academy
Employment & Employer Services (E&ES)
English for New Bostonians
EntreNous Community Empowerment, Inc.
ETSS
Eufaula Housing Authority/ YouthBuild
Fairfax Renaissance Development Corporation
Fessler and Bowman

Flint Odyssey House Inc.
Genesee, Livingston, Orleans, Wyoming (GLOW) Workforce Development Board
Goodwill Industries of North Louisiana, Inc.
Goodwill of the Olympics & Rainier Region
Goodwill-Easter Seals MN
Goyette Mechanical Co., Inc.
Greater Dover Chamber of Commerce
Greater Longview United Way
Greater Miami Service Corps
Greater Ohio Workforce Board
Greater Stark County Urban League
GST Michigan Works!
Hampton Area Chamber of Commerce
Health & Medicine Policy Research Group
Hope Whispers Community Org
IAM 751
IBEW Local Union 812
IEC Chesapeake
Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute
Infinite Revenue Medical Billing
Jeremiah Program
Jewish Family Services (Columbus)
Job Training Center of Tehama County
JobTrain
JVS Bay Area
JVS Boston
JVS SoCal
Kent County Essential Needs Task Force
Kings Against Violence Initiative
Kingsborough CC/CUNY
La Plaza de Encuentro Gathering Place (Encuentro)
Lee Contracting, Inc.
Link Recruiting, LLC
Literacy Center of West Michigan
Literacy Council of Reading-Berks
Literacy Pittsburgh
Literacy Source
Longview TX Chamber of Commerce
Lupson and Associates LLC
Machinists Institute
Madison Adult Career Center
Marvin Thomas Memorial Fund
Maryland Workforce Association
MENS Wear, Inc. d/b/a/ MWI Workforce Institute
Mesco Holdings, Inc.
Metrics Reporting, Inc.
Michigan Works! Association
Mosholu Montefiore Community Center
New Hampshire Adult Education Director's Alliance

New London Youth Affairs
New Moms
New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP)
New York City Employment and Training Coalition
NMIC
Nonprofit Alliance of Northeastern Connecticut (NANC)
North-Central Ohio Employer-Based Worker Training Partnership
Northeastern CT Chamber of Commerce
Norwich Regional Adult Education
NOVAworks
Ohio Workforce Coalition
Oregon Workforce Partnership
Oswego County Workforce New York
Over All Training
Patrick Antos Learning and Development Group
People Acting In Community Endeavors
Per Scholas Columbus
Per Scholas Greater Cincinnati
PODER
Portland Community College
Portland YouthBuilders
PPEP, Inc.
Quad Area Community Action Agency, Inc. / Quad YouthBuild
Quad County Urban League
Quality Improvement Strategies
Raise The Floor Alliance
RCSD OACES
Reconcile New Orleans
Restore Education
Richland Area Chamber & Economic Development
River City Community Development Corporation YouthBuild
Riverside Community College District
Safety Queens
Saffron Trust Women's Foundation
scaleLIT
SEMCA Michigan Works!
Sequoias Adult Education Consortium
Shenandoah Initiative for Adult Education
Skills GAP Solution LLC
Solar One
Somersworth Community Chamber of Commerce
Southeast Community Services
Southside Virginia Community College - Adult Education Program
St. Lawrence County One Stop Career Center
St. Louis Agency on Training and Employment
Stark Economic Development Board - Strengthening Stark
The Arc of Indiana
The Centers
The Connecticut Association for Adult & Continuing Education

The Literacy Cooperative
The Service Collaborative of WNY, Inc.
Towards Employment
TradePath LLC.
Tufts Medicine
Tuscarawas County Economic Development Corp.
United Way for Greater Austin
United Way for Southeastern Michigan
United Way of New York State & 211 New York Inc
United Ways of Texas
United Workforce Development Board
UNITE-LA
Urban League of St. Louis
Vernon Regional Adult Based Education
Villa Comunitaria
Washington Workforce Association
West Virginia Women Work
Windham Raymond Adult Education
Windsor Adult Education
Women Employed
Workforce Alliance
Workforce Council of Southwest Ohio
Workforce Development Board HMO, NY
Workforce Development Council of Seattle King County
Workforce Professionals Training Institute
Workforce Solutions Group
WZA Consultants
Youth Opportunities Unlimited
YouthBuild Columbus Community School
YouthBuild Just A Start
Youthprise
Zone 126