



Testimony by Maria K. Flynn
President and CEO, Jobs for the Future
Before the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee
“COVID-19 Recovery: Supporting Workers and Modernizing the Workforce Through Quality Education, Training, and Employment Opportunities”
April 20, 2021

Good morning Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Senate HELP Committee. My name is Maria Flynn. I am President and CEO of Jobs for the Future, a national nonprofit organization that has worked for nearly 40 years to drive change in America’s workforce and education systems to promote economic advancement for all—especially for people who earn low incomes, have been underserved by our current systems, and are underrepresented in high-wage, high-growth jobs.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, the United States workforce development ecosystem was overdue for increased investments and transformation to meet the vast skill and employment requirements of today’s workers and employers and prepare our labor force for the jobs of tomorrow. The pandemic has exponentially increased this need for change. Millions of Americans have lost jobs that won’t return and they require new skills to get back to work in our ever-evolving economy. We must learn from this crisis and use this moment of urgency as an opportunity to make the kinds of changes that are necessary if our economy is to rebound, our employers are to remain competitive, and our workers are to thrive.

The Devastation of the Pandemic Creates an Opportunity We Must Seize

It’s indisputable that the pandemic has been devastating for many American workers and the children, parents, and spouses who rely on them to help provide life’s necessities. More than 40 million U.S. workers have lost jobs and substantial financial ground since the start of the pandemic.¹ While unemployment trended down in March 2021, our nation still faces 9.7 million people who remain unemployed—4 million more than in February 2020.² And we must remember the millions of additional people who have given up on finding work and dropped out of the labor market completely—and the many people who are trying to get by on part-time and low-wage jobs.

Most devastating is the fact that the workers who are suffering the greatest economic hardship as a result of the crisis are the people our society has repeatedly left behind: low-wage earners and individuals with no postsecondary credentials—many of whom are Black, Latinx, or from other underrepresented populations. Frontline workers, who missed out on the decade of growth that followed the Great Recession, were on shaky economic ground even before COVID-19. Women have been disproportionately hurt by the crisis, losing jobs at far higher rates than

men, and squeezed by the closing of schools and the decimation of the U.S. child care sector. Nearly 3 million American women have left the labor force over the past year.³ Black workers and Hispanic and Asian women face significantly higher unemployment than other racial and ethnic groups. At the end of the fourth quarter of last year, the gap between white and Black unemployment grew to more than four percentage points.⁴

To help people return to the workforce and find better jobs than they had before, we must enable them to overcome the multiple barriers that impede their economic advancement. Since opportunities for education and economic advancement have not been shared equitably in the United States, it is critical that we close gaps in skills, credentials, employment attainment, and career progression associated with gender, race, ethnicity, and income status.

In the 21st-century economy, most in-demand jobs have required at least some postsecondary education and training. Before the pandemic, the United States faced severe shortages of workers with associate's degrees and certain technical credentials. The current crisis has exacerbated this trend. Economists have characterized the pandemic as an "automation forcing event" and increased demand for new ways of working require new kinds of knowledge, skills, and abilities.⁵ According to a recent study by The McKinsey Global Institute, more than half of the low-wage workers currently in declining occupations will need to shift to new occupations that require different skills. The study found that demand for workers in health care and STEM fields could grow now more than before the pandemic—and that "workers will need to learn more social and emotional skills, as well as technological skills, in order to move into occupations in higher-wage brackets."⁶

It is clear that reskilling is more important than ever. Millions of workers will be challenged to retool themselves for new roles and industries. Already we are seeing changes in the kinds of postsecondary programs that people are seeking. A growing body of evidence has identified an uptick in demand for shorter-term credentialing programs designed to help people learn the skills necessary to get back to work quickly.⁷ However, our financial aid systems rarely cover short-term workforce-oriented programs—even those with strong outcomes. These are some of the most important, yet still only some, of the challenges we face.

In order to create an inclusive economic recovery, ensure lasting economic growth, and maintain our nation's economic competitiveness, we need to meet the needs of individual workers, employers, and broader societal forces simultaneously. Looking at our current workforce ecosystem, it's clear that it cannot keep up with current demands. It's time to invest in transforming our array of workforce development and postsecondary programs into a truly modern *system* that is agile, well-resourced, equitable, and resilient, capable of innovating to take on whatever the future brings.

Our Current Workforce Development System

Our nation's current workforce development system is an array of postsecondary education, skills training, and workforce programs that provide vital education and employment services for America's workers. Many of these programs and institutions have worked hard to adapt to the new landscape the pandemic created—switching from in-person services to remote delivery and adjusting programming to meet the changing needs of the labor market. But the system, much of which was designed in previous eras, is not adequately funded nor agile enough to fully meet the skill needs of America's workers or employers in today's turbulent economy.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The federal government's primary workforce development system is authorized under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which was enacted in 2014. WIOA's goal was to update the system and make a number of changes to programs under its jurisdiction in order to do the following:

- Better align workforce programs with the skill needs of in-demand industries and occupations
- Adopt evidence-based strategies, such as career pathways, sector strategies, and connections to apprenticeship programs, to help jobseekers and workers attain industry-recognized postsecondary credentials needed for in-demand careers
- Improve services provided through the "one-stop" delivery system for jobseekers and employers
- Strengthen the strategic functions of workforce boards
- Encourage regional approaches to workforce development
- Better align WIOA initiatives with partner programs to leverage resources, system reach, and participant outcomes

Even with these changes, the WIOA system has not received adequate funding, nor is it currently designed to meet the nation's extensive career navigation, skills development, and worker transition needs as a stand-alone program.

The WIOA system performs many functions in our broader workforce ecosystem. It serves as a connector of programs, a convener of partners and stakeholders, and a translator of labor market information. It's also the access point through which learners, jobseekers, and workers gather the labor market and career information they need to make informed employment decisions, and where skills training can be arranged when resources are available. WIOA is responsible for the nationwide system of one-stop centers, which provide an array of employment services and connect customers to work-related training and education.

WIOA programs are also places where employers can go to search for skilled workers and to receive services in support of their human capital needs. Whether through services provided by business representatives or directly provided through American Job Centers, workforce systems

arrange for on-the-job and customized training, work with employers to identify skill and employment needs, provide layoff aversion services, and work to identify quality jobs. Workforce development boards are intended to play pivotal strategic roles in the design of comprehensive workforce development systems; engage with regional employers; lead innovative initiatives, including career pathways and sector strategies; and leverage additional resources to support workforce programming.

Successful [WIOA programs](#) are carrying out these and other high-quality evidence-based [strategies](#) to address the employment needs of their regional economies. However, the system's limited resources are spread too thin, performance across the more than 500 local workforce areas varies, and the entire workforce ecosystem needs significant modernization. The workforce system has also been forced to turn to virtual service delivery over the past year, with limited exceptions, due to the pandemic—a significant challenge for a system that was initially designed around brick-and-mortar structures.

The Workforce System We Need: Modern, Agile, Equitable, Resilient, Innovative, and Well Resourced

We know that calls for reform are not new. Before joining JFF, I served as a member of the Senior Executive Service at the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. In that capacity, I worked closely with Congress on the design and implementation of the Workforce Investment Act, the legislation that served as the foundation for WIOA. All told, I have focused my 30-year career on these issues, following in my father's footsteps. In fact, back in 1986, he testified before the House Ways and Means Committee calling for reforms to the Unemployment Insurance system so that it would be ready to meet the demand caused by future unemployment.

Yes, there have been calls for reform before. But this time truly is different. When COVID hit last March, our education and workforce systems were caught flat-footed, unprepared for the sudden, dramatic economic downturn. While we can hope that this has been a crisis of a generation or even a century, we have seen how critical it is to be fully prepared, which means developing the agility we need to meet rapidly changing demand in major sectors of our economy. And even in times of low unemployment, which we're all hoping to see again soon, we know that the jobs of tomorrow will look very different from the jobs of today.

Workforce development has become a lifelong mandate for every worker. Upskilling, reskilling, transition assistance, and career navigation services, are essential to help every individual create and sustain a career that will enable them to support themselves and their loved ones. Employers must also be able to readily access the talent they need to compete. The nation's workforce development ecosystem—programs authorized under WIOA and its related partner programs—must work collaboratively to meet these needs.

The United States needs a workforce ecosystem that is modern, agile, equitable, resilient, and innovative enough to keep up with the skill needs of individuals and in-demand employers alike. It is what all of our people deserve. To make that a reality, Congress should take a holistic look at how these programs can be modernized and streamlined to meet the needs of our economy and workers today and in the future. Specifically, we'd like to call attention to the following essential changes in the system's design.

We need a robust career navigation system. Few people have access to effective career navigation services today. We need to develop a comprehensive approach to helping students, jobseekers, and incumbent workers navigate the increasingly complex labor market and make well-informed education, career pathway, and employment decisions that will make or break their ability to support themselves and their families. These services should be offered in a variety of ways, at a variety of times, with in-person and remote options, so they are equally accessible to all.

We need a flexible, lifelong learning system. We need a skills development system that is adequately financed and easily accessible, where the structure and delivery of education and skills training are transformed. We need training options that allow learners to progress at an accelerated pace, award credit for prior learning, and offer stackable credentials that learners can accumulate as they move along pathways to further learning and degrees. And we need to find ways to capture skills and credentials in skills "passports" that are recognized across the education and workforce systems, and by employers. Equally critical is providing support services, ranging from academic tutoring to food assistance, transportation vouchers, and more, to ensure people can focus on their futures.

We need a system that makes full use of the latest in digital technologies to expand and improve service delivery for participants. We have learned through this pandemic that we must significantly bolster our ability to provide technology-enabled career navigation and training to meet the changing skill needs of in-demand employers and deliver customer experiences that meet the needs and expectations of today's jobseekers.

We need a system that supports the scaling of evidence-based models and strategies, including sector-focused, career pathways, and apprenticeship programs, and a wide array of work-based learning programs which provide essential experiences for adults and young people on pathways to family-supporting careers.

We need a system that partners in meaningful ways with employers, both on the design of education and skills training programs, and to [encourage employers to](#) provide training for their own frontline workers, set goals for diverse and inclusive hiring, identify ways to improve job quality for workers, and to adopt skills-based hiring practices for making employment decisions. Both the public and private sector have important roles to play in talent development and in designing an approach that maximizes the impact of each.

We need a system that can successfully meet the needs of diverse populations, including Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people, and others who have been hit hard by the pandemic. These are populations that have not shared equitably in earlier recoveries, and have not benefitted equitably in America's education and workforce systems. We must be intentional in our efforts to ensure equity in workforce programs and their outcomes; and we must find authentic ways to incorporate worker voice in the design of systems and programs.

And we need a system that values and invests in opportunity youth—one that builds bridges that link disconnected youth and young adults to postsecondary education and employment. This system would embrace evidence-based strategies that work for this population and expand opportunities for work-based learning and employment that lead to in-demand careers.

Achieving these goals will require reforms across the entire workforce development ecosystem. Siloed policy development for U.S. workforce, higher education, career and technical education, poverty alleviation, and economic development systems can no longer be accepted. These systems must all be considered—and transformed—so they can work together to form the critical workforce preparation ecosystem needed today and in the future.

We Can't Skimp on Workforce Investments

Federal funding for postsecondary education and workforce development programs amounts to about \$58 billion per year. That total includes education and training assistance for U.S. veterans and Pell Grants which help low-income students pay for college.⁸ Pell Grants make postsecondary education possible for millions of Americans who couldn't otherwise afford it. But the program is not flexible enough to meet the needs of a growing number of workers and learners who want to pursue short-term credentials or accelerated training. And while the GI Bill and related veterans employment assistance programs provide critical aid to former members of the military as they prepare for new jobs in civilian life, there are fewer options for nonveterans.

When Pell Grants and veterans programs are taken out of the equation, the United States invests only about \$16 billion annually in programs that provide workforce-focused education, employment, and training assistance for the rest of America's students, jobseekers, and workers. This funding is divided among 17 different education and workforce development programs, including career and technical education, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation programs, and initiatives authorized under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). In Fiscal Year 2020, funding for WIOA state formula grants—the primary employment and training assistance resource for low-income adults, youth, and dislocated workers—was a scant \$3.6 billion for all 50 states.⁹ Only \$1.3 billion of that went to employment and training assistance for dislocated workers.

It is no surprise that the nation's workforce development system cannot keep up with the immense needs of workers who have been devastated by the COVID-19 crisis, despite the

efforts of many high-quality and innovative state and local systems. A June 2020 report by the previous administration's White House Council of Economic Advisors noted that the United States would have to spend an additional \$80.4 billion on employment and training per year to match the average expenditures of other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries (based on percentage of GDP). With millions of Americans out of work and millions of others underemployed, the United States must do better.

Recommendations for Transforming the Nation's Workforce Development System

I. Increase Investments in America's Workforce.

JFF supports funding for workforce programs at levels consistent with those proposed for workforce development in the Biden Administration's [The American Jobs Plan](#) (\$100 billion). That level of funding would support the employment and skill needs of U.S. workers and employers, allow for needed transformation of workforce programs, and bring workforce investments into parity with those of other OECD countries. We urge Congress to do the following:

- Dedicate \$10 billion in funding for comprehensive career navigation services, including a graduated public-private matching requirement for states and regions
- Significantly increase investments in skills development in the following ways:
 - Provide \$50 billion for WIOA skills accounts, adult education, apprenticeships, and other forms of high-quality skills-based training for adults and youth
 - Expand Pell Grant eligibility to include high-quality short-term credentialing programs
 - Examine the potential of alternative financing mechanisms, such as income share agreements (ISA) and tax incentives for training, with adequate guardrails to protect consumers
 - Provide incentives for employers to engage in workforce efforts and invest in frontline worker training
- Invest \$10 billion in the alignment and modernization of the workforce development ecosystem by funding:
 - Systems change research, with an advanced research projects agency for the Department of Labor (modeled after DARPA), where rich new data sources, advances in data analysis, and experiments in training and technology can be turned into practical solutions for workers and employers
 - A federal technology fund to expand states' and regions' use of digital technologies
 - Cross-system investments in adult education, community colleges, and workforce development systems focused on increased collaboration, effective programming, professional development, and system innovation

- Scaling of reforms in the delivery of education and training through federal-state partnership grants, similar to reforms funded through TAACCCT
- Invest \$10 billion in comprehensive programs for opportunity youth to serve an additional 1 million to 2 million young people annually
- Invest in job creation, subsidized employment, and training opportunities in upcoming infrastructure, green energy, and health workforce initiatives

II. Make Systemic Changes in the Workforce Development Infrastructure

To get ahead of the challenges workers face in today's economy, we need a new era of research, innovation, and modernization of the nation's workforce development ecosystem. To help achieve this, Congress should take the following steps:

At the federal level:

- Fund research and development, providing assistance to states and regions on the use of technology and the latest innovative tools and strategies
- Fund the departments of Labor and Education to provide capacity-building and technical assistance to state and local staff—a downside of having a decentralized system is the lack of standardization in the delivery and quality of services
- Ensure that the departments of Labor and Education disseminate the findings from prior evaluations and products developed under prior federal investments, in actionable ways, to provide lessons for future actions and avoid the need to reinvent the wheel
- Fully align disconnected federal employment and training activities and funding at the federal, state, and regional levels through a streamlined workforce development fund

At the state and regional levels:

- Require systemic regional approaches in workforce development that are tied to regional economic development efforts (strengthening provisions already in WIOA)
- Dedicate funding for regional career pathways and sector strategies in the delivery of education and training, with expectations established for all partner programs
- Elevate the role of regional workforce boards with decision-making authority over comprehensive workforce programming with explicit funding for such activities
- Expand the vision of workforce development systems, accompanied by robust professional development supports for new modes of service delivery, tech-enabled services, data analysis, and interoperability with high-quality private offerings
- Implement changes in the structure and delivery of education and training that significantly expand opportunities for accelerated skills and credential attainment

III. Develop a Robust, Modernized Career Navigation System

The WIOA workforce system provides career navigation assistance to youth and adults who are enrolled to receive services under its programs, but these services are in need of modernization and are not accessible to non-WIOA participants. JFF urges Congress to do the following:

- Establish a robust career navigation system throughout the United States that:
 - Is comprehensive, offering real-time labor market information, career counseling, skills assessments, skill matching, and referral to training strategies; access to career pathways and accelerated reskilling services; and access to support and reemployment services
 - Provides all services virtually and through in-person networks via American Job Centers and affiliated sites (community colleges, secondary schools, libraries, community-based organizations) to increase access for all individuals, especially members of underserved and underrepresented populations and people in rural areas
 - Connects to existing national education and career counseling platforms offered through multiple access points (in person and virtually) and in multiple languages
 - Augments traditional labor market information made available through the Bureau of Labor Statistics with publicly available real-time labor market information currently available only through proprietary platforms
 - Increases the emphasis on and funding of professional development, including approaches that use new technologies and those that support racial equity
- Establish a new entity called the Career Advising Corps through the Corporation for National and Community Service that works with the workforce system's career navigation system and leverages emerging technology platforms.

IV. Create a Lifelong Learning System

The United States must invest in the education and training of its workforce and make changes in the ways education and training are provided to meet the needs of today's students, jobseekers, and workers and to ensure equitable employment outcomes. JFF urges Congress to do the following:

- Expand skills financing to increase funding for skills development in the following ways:
 - Establish skill grants under WIOA to pay for high-quality training programs on WIOA's Employment Training Provider Lists (ETPL) for training not covered by Pell
 - Expand tax advantaged skills training to encourage individual and employer investments in education and training, including Section 127 plans, lifelong learning accounts, and Earned Income Tax Credits
 - Transform the structure and delivery of education and skills training provided through workforce systems, community colleges, and other high-quality providers to ensure that skills training is more innovative and agile; responsive to the skill needs of in-demand employers; available in person and online; open to an expanded array of high-quality training providers and delivery structures with strong participant outcomes; augmented with expanded earn-and-learn opportunities; and scaling evidence-based strategies, including career pathways and sector strategies

- Create incentive grants for state community college systems and for consortia of institutions to scale evidence-based practices and innovations, including those tested through TAACCCT, that transform the nation's community college systems.

V. Ensure That U.S. Workers Are Protected in Times of Transition

The nation's response in helping workers who have lost jobs as a result of the COVID-19 crisis has been mixed at best. While certain shortcomings in unemployment insurance (UI) eligibility have been addressed through COVID-19 relief legislation, too many workers remain unemployed without adequate retraining and reemployment assistance, and without access to essential benefits. To address the transition needs of displaced workers, Congress should do the following:

- Enact systemic UI reforms that retain the CARES Act's expanded eligibility provisions, provide incentives for shared work and part-time UI, and adopt other system innovations that expand the flexibility and depth of coverage
- Ensure that federal infrastructure and job creation initiatives provide employment opportunities for individuals who have experienced long-term unemployment, and for opportunity youth
- Ensure greater connectivity and collaboration across the UI and workforce development systems and expand reemployment assistance that builds upon services provided under the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment program

VI. Ensure the Quality of Education and Training Programs

In today's economy, there is a significant increase in demand for short-term occupational skills training. Individuals who are looking to quickly reenter the labor market are increasingly pursuing education that is tied to in-demand employment, and secondary and postsecondary students are doing the same. This makes our ability to determine the quality of short-term and other postsecondary education programs more important than ever, especially as we consider public funding for such programs. To address this need, Congress should take the following steps:

- Implement a universally accepted quality control mechanism to ensure that programs and providers that receive federal workforce funding meet accepted levels of performance based on participant outcomes.
- Champion an interagency data connectivity and transparency initiative to improve data availability and promote its use by consumers making education, training, and employment decisions. This initiative should promote effective data privacy while

building upon current efforts, such as the College Scorecard and the WIOA Employment and Training Provider List (ETPL).

- Establish a national reporting process whereby all federally funded education and workforce training programs must provide data on the labor market outcomes of students and participants, based on standards established by the departments of Labor and Education.
- Require that participant data related to the services provided and program outcomes be disaggregated for each subpopulation by race, ethnicity, sex, age, and socioeconomic status. Policies should build in performance incentives for providers based on outcomes for subpopulations served.
- Require states to update their Eligible Training Provider Lists quarterly. Such updates should consider access to services and ongoing economic shifts in the labor market to ensure that training options are relevant to current and emerging in-demand industries and occupations. Consideration should also be given to the establishment of a national-level ETPL for high-quality training providers that operate nationwide.
- Extend WIOA measures to other education and training programs included in system alignment efforts.

VII. Encourage Employer Engagement

Employer engagement is key to the success of workforce development efforts. Employers must help inform the development and implementation of workforce development programs to ensure that the skills and credentials offered are of value to regional economies. Employers can also implement new practices that better serve jobseekers and workers, such as adopting skills-based hiring practices. To encourage these behaviors, as well as increased employer investments in their own frontline workers, Congress can take these actions:

- Enhance business services provided through the workforce system that reflect regional economic priorities and are relevant to the needs of in-demand industries. Examples include the following:
 - Investments in workforce intermediaries and industry partnerships
 - Funding for the expansion of apprenticeships
 - Funding of professional development and other human resources activities for midsize and small employers that can focus on issues ranging from job quality and diversity and inclusion to the use of workforce tools and technologies
- Provide economic incentives to employers for investing in their current and future workers.
- Support efforts, such as those being led by the [Open Skills Network](#), to accelerate the shift to skills-based hiring through the development and implementation of a common

skills language used by employers, learners, jobseekers, and education providers, including development of skills “passports.” Federal support for these efforts may include pilots that use innovative technologies, such as blockchain, to ensure portability and verification; convening key stakeholders; and supporting research and development.

VIII. Target Programming to Individuals Facing Barriers to Education and Employment

To address the needs of people who face the greatest barriers to employment and who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, Congress can focus on providing supports like these:

- Access to high-quality skills development opportunities as well as on-ramps to career pathways. Federal policy needs to promote skills development as an economic mobility strategy by providing funding and expanding evidence-based strategies, such as sector-focused career pathways.
- Services that address the unique needs of members of specific populations by helping them persist in education and work.
- Expanded opportunities to gain employment through strategies that may include transitional jobs, subsidized employment, earn-and-learn arrangements, and other models that result in skills and credential attainment and lead to family-supporting careers.

IX. Increase Investments in and Programming for Opportunity Youth

Even before COVID-19, young people, especially young people of color and those who come from low-income backgrounds, were facing declining economic prospects.¹⁰ Youth unemployment rates were, and continue to be, twice as high as the national average: 4.6 million young adults ages 16 to 24 were out of school and unemployed before the pandemic struck, and more than one-third of those young people were living in poverty. This population, known as opportunity youth, has grown significantly during the pandemic. Now roughly 10 million young people are out of school (at both the high school and college levels) and out of work.¹¹ For these individuals, building skills and gaining work experience are key to upward mobility, however the pandemic has all but shut off opportunities for employment.

To address the needs of vulnerable youth, Congress should take the following steps:

- Increase investments in programs that serve this population, as described earlier.
- Continue to prioritize services for out-of-school youth in WIOA youth programs, while also ensuring that the nation’s K-12 education system devotes adequate funding and attention to young people who are at risk of disengaging from high school. We urge the expansion of policies that support reengagement of these young people through

evidence-based strategies such as pathways approaches (such as [Back on Track](#)) and other models with proven success.

- Establish a new competitive grant program to serve local areas with high concentrations of opportunity youth. This program should align multiple initiatives and partners through collective impact strategies for serving in-school and out-of-school youth who are at risk of disconnection; expand evidence-based strategies for helping opportunity youth succeed; and focus on solutions that address the education and employment needs of underrepresented youth, including members of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations, who have been historically underserved, with special attention to racial equity.

Ensure that youth programs build upon evidence-based models and service delivery strategies that have proved to be successful in serving opportunity youth. These approaches include career navigation services that use technology, such as [MyBestBets](#); career pathways models, such as JFF's [Back on Track initiative](#), that provide on-ramps to postsecondary education and employment opportunities that end with the attainment of valued credentials and in-demand careers; expanded opportunities to participate in work-based learning programs, including pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships; and mentoring, mental health services, trauma-informed counseling, and other critical wraparound supports.

Conclusion

Before the onset of COVID-19, the United States was already facing labor market disruption that was pushing policymakers, systems leaders, and practitioners to rethink the status quo and design modern approaches to address the skill needs of today's jobseekers, workers, and employers. The pandemic exacerbated these shifts, causing a devastating economic downturn that has left people, businesses, and local economies struggling to survive.

Now is the time to transform our nation's workforce development system. We must devote more resources for skills development, modernize career navigation services, offer more assistance to people who are planning their career pathways, provide necessary transition assistance to displaced workers, and ensure that our nation's most underserved populations are able to succeed. If we do these things, we will meet the needs of today's workers and our evolving economy, while building a strong foundation for the future.

JFF urges the Members of the HELP Committee and Congress to take action and create a workforce system that works.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Senate HELP Committee. I look forward to continuing to work with you on these critical issues.

For more information, please contact:

Mary Gardner Clagett, Senior Director for Workforce Policy, JFF

Taylor Maag, Senior Policy Manager, JFF

About JFF

JFF is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in the American workforce and education systems. For nearly 40 years, JFF has led the way in designing innovative and scalable solutions that create access to economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

Endnotes

¹ Nelson D. Schwartz, Ben Casselman, and Ella Koeze, “How Bad Is Unemployment? ‘Literally Off the Charts’ ” *The New York Times*, May 8, 2020, <https://nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/08/business/economy/april-jobs-report.html>.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, “The Employment Situation—March 2021,” news release no. USDL-21-0582, U.S. Department of Labor, April 2, 2021, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>.

³ Megan Cerullo, “Nearly 3 Million U.S. Women Have Dropped Out of the Labor Force in the Past Year,” CBS News Moneywatch, February 5, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-crisis-3-million-women-labor-force/>.

⁴ “Table E-16. Unemployment Rates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity,” Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, last modified January 8, 2021, https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm.

⁵ Allison Dulin Salisbury, “COVID-19 May Become ‘An Automation Forcing Event’: Already Vulnerable Workers Look to Reskilling For Path Forward,” *Forbes*, May 7, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/allisondulinsalisbury/2020/05/07/covid-19-may-become-an-automation-forcing-event-already-vulnerable-workers-look-to-reskilling-for-path-forward>.

⁶ Susan Lund et al., *The Future of Work After COVID-19* (New York, NY: McKinsey Global Institute, February 2021), <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-after-covid-19>.

⁷ Paul Fain, “Alternative Credentials on the Rise,” *Inside Higher Ed*, August 27, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/08/27/interest-spikes-short-term-online-credentials-will-it-be-sustained>.

⁸ JFF, *America’s Untapped Workforce: Federal Programs to Help Develop a Critical Talent Pipeline* (Boston, MA: JFF, March 2019), <https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/BRF-DC-Untapped-Workforce-Federal-Programs-030719-FINAL.pdf>.

⁹ JFF, *America's Untapped Workforce*, <https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/BRF-DC-Untapped-Workforce-Federal-Programs-030719-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁰ JFF, *Investments in Opportunity Youth Fuel Prosperity* (Boston, MA: JFF, December 4, 2018), <https://www.jff.org/resources/investments-opportunity-youth-fuel-prosperity>.

¹¹ Richard Fry and Amanda Barroso, "Amid Coronavirus Outbreak, Nearly 3 in 10 Young People Are 'Disconnected,'" *State Legislature Magazine* (Washington, DC: National Conference of State Legislatures, August 6, 2020), <https://www.ncsl.org/bookstore/state-legislatures-magazine/covid-19-nearly-3-in-10-young-people-are-disconnected-magazine2020.aspx>.