

May 4, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
United States Senate
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Enzi, Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
United States Senate
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
173 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
United States Senate
120 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi, Senator Murray, and Senator Isakson:

We write as organizations that seek to improve the educational and economic outcomes of low-skilled adults, including out-of-school youth aged 16 or older. Many of these people are served by programs funded through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). We see a tremendous opportunity in the reauthorization of WIA: to make changes to Title II so that adult education and English literacy programs are able to ensure that more low-skilled individuals move along the continuum from low skills to success in college and job training, career pathways, and jobs that pay a family-supporting wage. Not only will such success be good for many millions of individuals, but it is vital for our nation to compete effectively in the global economy.

Tinkering at the edges of the law or simply adding more allowable uses for funds will not be sufficient to achieve this high priority goal. Therefore, we urge you to be bold in making changes to Title II. Specifically, adult education must have a much stronger workforce and postsecondary emphasis so that all participants, including those at the lowest literacy levels, have access to better opportunities for themselves and their families. While the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act would help move the system significantly in this direction, it does not go nearly far enough. To truly achieve a system that provides greater opportunities for low-skilled individuals requires rethinking the purpose of Title II, as well as the state and local activities under that Title. It necessitates reforming the National Reporting System to move toward a system that emphasizes better performance and outcomes for all students, not just those who are close to transitioning into the workforce or postsecondary education and training. And, it entails including provisions that provide a mix of incentives and requirements for states to more closely align and connect Titles I and II so those in the workforce, both incumbent and potential workers, can build their literacy, language, and employability skills quicker.

We realize these are not easy changes to bring about, but they are essential if adult education is to be a viable pathway to better lives for more low-skilled Americans.

We appreciate your efforts to develop a WIA reauthorization bill that will help more people achieve family-supporting jobs and further education to that end. We look forward to continuing to work with you on reauthorization and building support for a transformed adult education and workforce system.

Respectfully submitted by,

Center for American Progress (Washington, DC)

Center for Law and Social Policy (Washington, DC)

Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (Ann Arbor, MI)

Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy/

National Commission on Adult Literacy (New York, NY)

Jobs for the Future (Boston, MA)

National Skills Coalition (Washington, DC)