

**TESTIMONY OF
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FOR THE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE SAFETY
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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Good morning, Chairperson Murray and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for extending the invitation to speak with you about the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, or WIA.

Secretary of Labor Solis has established a goal of “A good job for everyone.” The reauthorization of WIA is critical to achieving the Secretary’s goal by helping workers who are unemployed or in low-wage jobs find a path to middle class jobs, providing them with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in a knowledge-based economy. Helping Americans build the skills to compete for the jobs of the future is a top priority of this Administration, as President Obama made clear earlier this week when he announced a new initiative to transform the opportunities available at our nation’s community colleges. The Departments of Labor and Education have also taken steps to make it easier for recipients of Unemployment Insurance to seek retraining and educational opportunities while the economy recovers.

Our WIA system has been tested in these harsh economic times. WIA One-Stops are welcoming record numbers of your constituents who are looking for career counseling, work-related services, and job training. With the additional funding provided

through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act), we are helping more job-seekers and workers through the workforce system. For example, in your home state of Washington, Senator Murray, Recovery Act funds are making it possible to place additional staff where they are needed most to provide reemployment services to Unemployment Insurance claimants and other job seekers. Beginning in May 2009, 1,500 new computers are being installed in job-seeker resource rooms at local WorkSource offices all over Washington in order to speed up and improve service to out-of-work Washington residents. Also using Recovery Act resources, the state has identified over 980 different worksites statewide that will provide over 5,000 youth with a meaningful work experience during the summer employment program. These worksites include private, public, and non-profit employers that are giving youth opportunities that will help them in choosing a career path in green industries and other high-demand fields.

Georgia is using Recovery Act funds to reinvigorate its workforce system and serve the large numbers of workers now seeking its services. For example, the state is extending the hours of operation at One-Stop Career Centers and expanding service capacity through the use of mobile units. Georgia is also using Recovery Act funds to provide individuals served through the WIA Adult program with additional supportive services and needs-based payments for items such as emergency rent, car repairs, eye glasses, and other unexpected needs, to help individuals remain in the training they need to find a new job.

In Michigan, an established initiative, “No Worker Left Behind” combines WIA with other workforce funds to provide any unemployed, laid off, or low-income

jobseekers with two years of tuition, up to \$10,000 total, to attend any Michigan community college, university, or approved training program after a skills assessment. Participants must use the funds to pursue a credential in a high-demand occupation or emerging industry or in entrepreneurship. In addition, the funds received under the Recovery Act have allowed Michigan to bolster its services to Unemployment Insurance claimants. The state has added significant numbers of staff to provide career readiness assessments, one-on-one career guidance and case management, individual service strategies, and referrals to training.

However, in each case these services are being provided through a law enacted over a decade ago, and whose authorization expired in 2003. Although there is a widespread consensus that WIA needs to be reformed and reinvigorated, past efforts to do so have failed. With a new Administration and Congress, we now have an opportunity for a successful reauthorization of this important law.

The Administration supports the reauthorization of WIA. We believe WIA reauthorization should create a modernized system that provides seamless career advancement services for low-skilled adults, at-risk youth, and dislocated workers and others needing employment, training and retraining services. This system should embody a dual customer approach, which meets the needs of both workers and employers, in developing thriving communities where all citizens succeed and businesses prosper.

Our approach will be to reach broadly across multiple departments, including the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, to ensure that programs work harmoniously and effectively at the local level. For example, we believe customers should be able to access any federal education and training program, as well as education

and training opportunities provided by community colleges, through the One-Stop system in a manner that supports the achievement of the individual's educational and career goals. Services should be available in person as well as virtually, and the system should make the best use of technology to reach and serve job-seekers and workers. The system should be accessible to all individuals with disabilities seeking employment and meet their unique needs. Eligibility determination processes for the various programs should be simplified and harmonized to the maximum extent possible, to ensure that individuals can readily access the services they need. The One-Stop Career Centers should be able to provide each individual a quick and effective assessment of skills and the best plan of services given the customer's interests and skill level. Performance measures for accountability should be designed to recognize the value-added of services and avoid creating disincentives to serve participants who have the greatest need for assistance. And performance information on training programs should be widely available, so individuals can make informed choices about which programs best meet their needs.

One criticism that we hear repeatedly is that we have asked local areas to partner with various stakeholders, and yet inside the Beltway we are conducting siloed business as usual. We have already begun to address that in our preliminary interagency discussions. I know that this Federal-level collaboration will require on-going commitment and daily effort. I know that the leadership at the Department of Education shares our genuine commitment to a real partnership. Our hope is that in working together, we can reduce the burden of duplicative reporting for local providers and that we can make real progress toward a seamless delivery system at the Federal level.

We are looking to build on the WIA structure that this Committee created in 1998, and to make improvements based on the lessons learned over the decade of its implementation. We are committed to working to support you as you begin the job of drafting that legislation. We hope to be a valued partner, and we hope that today will be the beginning of a collaborative process that ends with President Obama signing into law a reinvigorated WIA that will help put our country back to work.

This concludes my prepared remarks, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.