



NCSDAE National Council of State Directors of Adult Education

Joanie Rethlake, Chair

June 17, 2011

The Honorable Tom Harkin
The Honorable Patty Murray
The Honorable Michael Enzi
The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Harkin, Murray, Enzi and Isakson:

On behalf of the State Directors of Adult Education I want to commend you on the draft legislation to amend and reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act. The 1998 bill provided helpful guidance for states in developing adult education and workforce systems. Your proposal builds on those strengths while improving those provisions.

We appreciate many of our revisions in the bill. We especially appreciate the increase in the state leadership provision from 12 ½% to 15%. This modest increase will allow us to better prepare our teachers, develop career pathway initiatives with our partners, develop curricula that integrate workforce skills and use data to improve our program services.

We also appreciate your including the adult education state director on the state Workforce Investment Board. By being at the table, the state director can develop collaborative efforts and align adult education policy to support building career pathway systems.

As the professionals that manage and lead the state adult education efforts, we have identified a few places where if adjusted, the bill could be stronger. We have attached those recommendations.

Should you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or Dr. Lennox McLendon in our Washington office at dc2@ncsdae.org 202.624.5250 (office) or 804.314.6747 (cell).

Thank you again for your commitment to adult learners across the country.

Sincerely,

Joanie Rethlake

Joanie Rethlake, Chair

+Stakeholder Comment Form

Senate discussion draft of the Workforce Investment Act of 2011

This form should accompany your organization's comment letter. Please send both documents (as attachments to a single email) to ews@help.senate.gov no later than Friday, June 17th at 8:00pm.

Organization: National Council of State Directors of Adult Education

One contact person: Lennox McLendon

Contact email: dc2@ncsdae.org and llmcl422@netscape.net

Contact phone number: 804.314.6747 cell; 202 624 5250 office

The Adult Education State Directors commend the Senate for the proposed revisions to the Workforce Investment Act. We offer these few recommendations to complement your work.

1). Title I: Performance Indicators—Educational Gains

Recommendation: Rewrite Section 131(b)(2)(A)(i)(V) to read as follows: "the percentage of program participants who have been enrolled in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment who have achieved measurable educational and/or occupational skill gains."

Rationale: Not every participant can reach the educational or occupation skill level to enter employment or postsecondary education or training in a program year; many need time to hone their skills. For those participants as well as those who reach those goals, performance is measured by gains toward those goals.

2) Title I: Performance Indicators—Secondary Education Milestone

Recommendation:

- 1) Amend Section 131 (b)(2)(A)(IV) line 9 strike "(subject to clause (iii))".
- 2) Consistent with 1), page 134 strike lines 6 through 19.

Rationale: A secondary diploma or its equivalent historically has been a milestone for undereducated adults. Research tells us that once they achieve that milestone, it is often up to

five years before they begin the next step because of family, work and community obligations that have been neglected while they focused on their secondary education. For those reasons, attainment of this milestone should be considered a performance indicator on its own.

3. Title II: Infrastructure costs

3.1 Recommendation: 1. A line item for infrastructure

3.1 Rationale: Any way we work it out, funding to provide the infrastructure cost comes from client services. We have waiting list for services and no other source of funding to meet the need.

3.2 Question: Does Title II share in the infrastructure costs?

3.2 Regarding Section 221(h)(D)(i)(I) and (II), does this read to say that the infrastructure costs come from the partners (I) but not from Title II (II).

4 Title III: State Leadership: required technical assistance to eligible providers

Recommendation: delete Section 323 (a)(1)(C) that requires states to provide “technical assistance to eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities....”

Rationale: In the proposed bill:

- “Eligible providers” include local education agencies, community-based organizations, volunteer literacy organizations, institutions of higher education, public and private non-profit agencies, libraries, public housing authorities, other nonprofit institutions, consortia or coalitions of organizations, and public-private partnerships.
- Required technical assistance includes: development and dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices, staff training, their role as one-stop partners, and use of technology and staff training.

There may be hundreds of eligible providers in a state.

Even though we would like as many organizations as possible involved in adult literacy, being required to provide technical assistance to all who ask is a severe burden on the state staff.

The proposed 2 ½ % increase in state leadership funds is desperately needed to provide training and technical assistance for current providers for resource, curriculum and professional development to create career pathways, integrated education and training, contextualizing instruction around high demand jobs, create and maintain partnerships with other organizations, agencies and employers in the region, and collect and analyze data to improve the quality of

adult education services. As you can see, even with the 2 ½% increase in state leadership, there is limited capacity and funding to take on additional technical assistance responsibilities across the state.

Possible Report Language: The bill requires the eligible agency to provide technical assistance to eligible providers of adult education. The Committee recognizes that trying to reach all potential providers in a state could place an undue burden on the eligible agency. It is the view of the Committee that providing required information on its website would, in fact, satisfy this requirement, as would answering question posted by individual eligible providers.

5. Title I: Earnings Performance Measure

Recommendation: Amend Section 331(i)(1) to require, in states that do not have data matching, the WIB, in consultation with the Governor, develop an alternative for collecting required data.

Rationale: In sixteen states (including California and New York) education organizations are not allowed to collect social security numbers. As a result, using the UI wage records to document earnings is not possible causing local programs to use labor intensive surveys that often yield inadequate returns to document performance.

Possible Report Language: The Committee is aware that many (16) states currently do not allow educational providers to collect Social Security Numbers making data matching impossible. Some providers, including adult education, must use labor intensive surveys that often yield inadequate returns to document performance. The Committee would encourage Governors in such states to work with their Workforce Investment Boards to develop alternative methods to collect required data in an effort to assist such states to accurately portray performance in their state.

6. Title III: State Grant initial allotments

Recommendation: In Section 311 (c)(1)(B) strike \$250,000 and insert \$350,000

Rationale: The initial allotment in the state funding formula is critically important to small states. That initial allotment portion of the formula has been \$250,000 since 1982. Small states, particularly those with federal grants under \$2,000,000 with little cash from their nonfederal share at the state level, have found it more and more difficult to offer a high level of quality service, particularly in rural areas. This increase in the initial allotment would provide some remedy to that situation.

7. Definitions: Eligible Individual

Recommendation: Amend Section 303 (4) page 3, line 23 striking “and” after “equivalent,” and before “has” and inserting “or”.

Rationale: From the National Assessment of Adult Literacy we know that millions of adults have a high school diploma but are not functioning on a level to enter postsecondary education and training. In short they received a 20th century education in preparation for a 20th century job. Those skills are insufficient in the 21st century workplace.

By changing the language for eligible individual to include both those who do not have a diploma or equivalent as well as those who have a diploma but do not have secondary skills, providers are able to address the needs of the individuals in need of services.

8. Title III: Definition—Eligible Provider

Recommendation: Amend 303(5)(J) to read “a partnership between an employer and other eligible provider wherein the employer provides 50% of the cost of services.

Rationale: To avoid diverting scarce public resources to businesses that will receive a financial benefit from better educated employees, costs should be shared.

9. Title III: State Leadership Activities

Recommendations: In Section 323(a)(1), page 19, line 20 strike “and” and everything that follows through “purposes” on line 22.

Rationale: States receive state, private and foundation funds that support state leadership activities. Each source has its own requirements. Therefore, we need to strike this phrase as these funds should not be subject to the provisions of this section.

10. Title III: Purpose

Recommendation: Amend Section 302 (3), line 22 by inserting “or its recognized equivalent” after “diploma” and before “and.”

Rationale: Business and industry and most post-secondary institutions recognize equivalent high school certification and it gives a viable option for adults and out of school youth.

11. Title I: Definition of Industry or Sector Partnership

Recommendation: Amend Section 101 (26) to include provider of Title III services.

Rationale: It is essential for education and training programs to be engaged in sector partnerships. To that end, adult education provides contextualized instruction and soft skills in preparation for adults entering an industry cluster. Adult education providers included in the partnership can keep industry representatives aware of the services available and necessary for lower functioning employees as well as ensuring that instruction is geared toward the skills of that cluster.

12. Title I: Indicator for Services to Employers

Recommendation: Amend Section 131 (b)(A)(iv) on page 135 line 7 delete “.” and add “including indicators of workplace adult education and literacy activities.”

Rationale: Historically, adult educators have collaborated with employers to offer adult education services in the workplace in order for employees to maintain employment and the employer can continue to compete in a global marketplace. Such activities are of great value to an employer and the employees. Because they have unique outcomes they require a unique set of performance indicators.

Possible Report Language: The bill requires the development of performance indicators for services to employers. In developing such measures, the Committee urges the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education and the representatives with whom they consult in the development of such indicators of performance, not to overlook services provided through such programs as workplace adult education and literacy activities.

13. Title I: Sanctions

Question: Section 131 (f)(1)(A) On page 150, line 18 refers to a State failing to meet the “State adjusted levels”—does that mean ALL levels since it is plural?

Comment: Section 131(f)(1)(B) Page 150, line 1 details reduction in Amount of Grant. It takes quite a bit of time to identify causes for poor performance, identify strategies that hold promise for improving that performance, pilot test the new strategies to ensure they work, implement the strategies state-wide, and measure the impact. The time allotted in this section does not give states the time to show improvement.

14. Title III: Intensity and duration

Recommendation: Amend Section 331(e)(4)(A) page 31 line 16 by inserting “, duration” after “intensity” and before “and”

Rationale: Duration is understood to mean the length of time a participant participates. Time on task is a recognized asset to learning. Intensity, the number of hours per week is important. So

is the quality of instruction. However, duration is an equally important goal for all local programs.

In *An Evidence-based Adult Education Program Model Appropriate for Research*, John Comings and Lisa Soricone, Harvard University and Maricel Santos, San Francisco State University (http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/abepds/an_evidence-based_adult_education_program_model_appropriate_for_research-march_2006.pdf) cite that “*Intensity* refers to the number of hours a student attends a program each week, while *duration* refers to the total number of weeks a student is enrolled in a program. Insufficient intensity or duration can lead to a lack of learning gains, or gains too low to measure.” Intensity and duration are critical aspects of our profession. As a result, it is important to monitor duration of our students and integrate strategies to improve their duration to improve their learning gains.

Possible Report Language: While the Committee removed language from this provision dealing with “duration” the Committee believes it is important for programs to provide adequate time and length of services for program participants to advance along career pathways, particularly for adults with barriers to employment.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your work.

Joanie Rethlake

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Chair