



May 31, 2024

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman
Health, Education, Labor, and
Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Ranking Member
Health, Education, Labor, and
Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

As a consortium of employers and innovative education providers, the Skills First Coalition advocates to advance policies that invest in and strengthen the alignment between education and skills training for in-demand jobs, expanding both lifelong learning and career opportunities for millions of Americans.

We write today to share our collective perspectives on the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which oversees America’s workforce development system, and ways in which it can be modernized to meet the demands of today’s evolving economy. As a coalition, we are very encouraged by the strong 378-26 bipartisan vote in the U.S. House of Representatives to improve WIOA through H.R. 6655, *A Stronger Workforce for America Act*. Furthermore, the Bipartisan Senate AI Working Group in a recent [report](#) encourages the Senate to develop legislation related to training, upskilling, and reskilling to ensure all Americans can work alongside new AI tools. H.R. 6655 is the right place to start and we urge the Senate to incorporate many of its provisions when embarking on this important work.

The Skills First Coalition recommends the following policies to be included in a WIOA reauthorization:

Advance a Skills-Based Economy

As our digital economy transforms, especially with the emergence of generative AI changing the way in which work is conducted, we should enable stakeholders within the workforce system to measure

and ultimately reward an individual's existing knowledge, skills, competencies, and past experiences for effective placement into career pathways and employment. This will help to expand opportunities for job seekers and assist employers in broadening talent pools. We recommend WIOA:

- Encourage employers to hire based on skills and competencies when using WIOA funds for on-the-job, incumbent worker, customized, and transitional worker WIOA-funded training programs.
- Expand current technical assistance provisions to include support to employers seeking to implement skills-first hiring, which could be carried out through intermediaries such as employer associations.
- Leverage the currently required skill assessments under WIOA to recognize and verify the knowledge and skills attained by job seekers in prior work and life experience, both formally and informally.
- Enhance WIOA's definitions related to "basic skills deficient," "training," and "individual with a barrier to employment" to include digital literacy—changes that would help learners prioritize the acquisition of these skills in the future.
- Allow funds to support system implementation, strategy development, research, evaluation, and benchmarking of skills-first hiring efforts.

Expand and Prioritize Employer-Led Training

As the ultimate consumers of the publicly funded workforce development system, employers often have the most direct understanding of which programs provide the best value and return on investment. Therefore, the system must work closely with employers, prioritizing employer-led training, to ensure the training provided is primarily focused on helping job seekers secure employment and advancing in their career. Streamlining processes for accessing job training funds and allowing additional supportive services to participants would further leverage investment from the private sector as would recognizing and equalizing many non-traditional ways that companies support multiple employment pathways. We recommend WIOA:

- Increase funding directly for skills training so more individuals can secure and retain employment.
- Prioritize employer-led training, such as work-based learning, on-the-job training, customized training, earn-while-you-learn programs, and apprenticeships.
- Remove caps that limit the percentage of WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker funds that may be used for incumbent worker training.
- Simplify employment and training program requirements and provide more flexibility to state and local workforce development boards so the system is easier to navigate for both job seekers and employers.
- Incentivize states to offer reciprocity to high-quality training providers to streamline the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) application process for multi-state providers and prioritize those programs that have a strong return on investment.

Support High-Quality Outcomes with High-Quality Data Systems

Structured data about learning combined with structured data about employment can remove friction when applying for education opportunities and jobs. More importantly, it will also provide

comprehensive data on outcomes for every program, credential, and career pathway so that everyone can make informed decisions that generate impact and positive outcomes. We recommend WIOA:

- Facilitate access to centralized tools, such as state UI wage records and/or public-private data trusts and consortiums, to assist education and training providers in obtaining accurate outcomes data.
- Encourage states to work collectively to streamline credential reporting in a standardized way that includes skills and competencies, industry recognition, and employment outcomes.
- Prioritize providers where employers have financial skin-in-the game, provide on-the-job work experience, or commit to providing program completers an opportunity for employment.
- Explicitly allow multiple modalities, including online and hybrid models, of skills development programs as long as they continue to meet the common set of outcome metrics required of all programs.
- Promote and expand no cost, online training courses that lead to industry recognized certifications for specific skills by encouraging all states to leverage these no cost resources and include these types of providers on their ETPLs.

We look forward to working with you and all the Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee to advance bipartisan workforce development reforms that have the potential to enable many more Americans to reskill and upskill in our ever-changing economy. Thank you for the opportunity to share our recommendations on how to modernize America's workforce development system.

Sincerely,

The Skills First Coalition

IBM Corporation	LinkedIn
Cengage Group	National University
American Trucking Associations	Presidents Forum
Analog Devices, Inc.	Randstad
Autos Drive America	Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA)
Chegg	Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA)
CompTIA	Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)
Information Technology Industry Council (ITI)	Tokyo Electron U.S. Holdings, Inc.
International Paper	Western Governors University

cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee
The Bipartisan Senate AI Working Group