



Tuesday, July 30, 2013

The Honorable Thomas Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, &
Pensions
US Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, &
Pensions
US Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Alexander:

On behalf of the Hispanic Education Coalition (HEC), which unites more than 20 organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for the more than 54 million Hispanics living in the United States and Puerto Rico, we write to express our support of the current bi-partisan Senate approach to the Workforce Investment Act of 2013 (WIA).

Reauthorization of WIA is important to the Latino community. Joblessness is disproportionately felt by Latinos, and low-wage work is disproportionately filled by limited English proficient (LEP) workers, who are predominantly Latino. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has found that the national unemployment rate of Latinos is 1.5% higher than the national unemployment rate as a whole. In addition, the Migration Policy Institute has estimated that while 9 percent of the workforce in the United States is LEP, these workers fill 39 percent of low-skilled jobs. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, moreover has found that over 60 percent of all job openings over the next decade will require post-high school education or training. Because twenty-first century jobs will require more training, WIA programs need to prioritize underserved populations. HEC is happy to see that the proposed Workforce Investment Act of 2013 strives toward these goals.

The Workforce Investment Act of 2013 emphasizes (1) an increased focus on workers with limited basic education and English skills; (2) a coordinated approach among key partners such as adult education and community colleges; and (3) results measured by whether workers are gaining industry-recognized post-secondary credentials. Moreover, the bill strengthens the new Title III Adult Education and Literacy section by (1) including technological literacy in the definition of workforce preparation, and (2) integrating English literacy and civics education through the alignment of adult education and WIA workforce training programs and services. As you know, the Senate has recently passed the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act. HEC is encouraged at the express inclusion of immigrant education in the WIA discussion draft. Moving forward, HEC requests that the goals and definitions of English proficiency and civics in WIA be aligned with present and

future versions of immigration reform. HEC also requests that funding of Title III reflect the likely increased demand resulting from immigration reform.

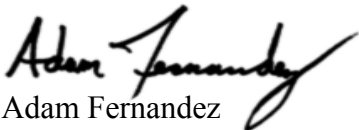
HEC looks forward to working with you to improve the bill by:

- (1) including digital literacy in the definition of adult education,
- (2) adding “career advancement” to the definition of English language acquisition,
- (3) improving community stakeholder participation in workforce investment boards, and
- (4) defining “Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program” in Title III as “contextualized instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation, and United State history and Government to help such an individual acquire the skills and knowledge to become an active and informed parent, work, community member, and citizen.”

Should the Workforce Investment Act of 2013 reach conference committee, HEC expresses its strong disapproval of H.R. 803, the *Supporting Knowledge and Investing in Lifelong Skills (SKILLS) Act of 2013*. The SKILLS Act removes multiple workforce development programs currently serving (1) migrant and seasonal farmworkers, (2) veterans, (3) youth, (4) refugees, (5) seniors, (6) formerly incarcerated individuals, (7) women seeking apprenticeships and nontraditional occupations, and (8) other unique workforce sectors. Consolidation through elimination of subgroup protections is not a sound means to reauthorize WIA. Such an approach would leave Latino and other workers currently served under these various targeted programs without the training they need to access jobs in these difficult times.

Thank you again for your work on the Workforce Investment Act of 2013. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the HEC co-chairs: Adam Fernandez of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, at afernandez@maldef.org, or Luis Torres of the League of United Latin American Citizens, at latorres@lulac.org.

Sincerely,



Adam Fernandez
HEC Co-Chair
Mexican American Legal
Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)



Luis Torres
HEC Co-Chair
League of United Latin
American Citizens (LULAC)

Cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Health Education Labor & Pensions