



Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy

1221 Avenue of the Americas ♦ 46th Floor ♦ New York, NY 10020

Gail Spangenberg
President

November 5, 2009

Dear Colleague,

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is one of the nation's most powerful vehicles to transform adult education and workforce development in America, and to achieve the economic growth so essential to the future of our states and the nation. Yet, as health care reform continues to dominate the Congressional agenda, WIA reauthorization, already long overdue, has been on hold along with other high priority national programs for the past several months.

It is likely that health care reform will soon be behind us. When that happens, Congress will be flooded with a huge agenda of backlogged legislation. In the flurry, some national representatives, both in and out of Congress, are concerned that WIA may find itself competing for attention with other priorities. There is a real danger that WIA (and the recently introduced Adult Education and Economic Growth Act, known as the AEEG Act) will not get the concentrated attention it so urgently needs.

Adult education is linked to WIA, which is linked to meeting global competitiveness needs, which is linked to economic growth and to the core values and security of our democracy.

Virtually every major group working on adult education (including ESL, family literacy, and correctional education), on workforce skills development, and on the development of career pathways recognizes the extremely high importance of a revamped WIA – for as many as 88 million out-of-school adults. We have before us a moment of golden opportunity. We can't afford to take anything for granted. The fact is that despite all the work that has been done over the past year by many national groups, members of the National Commission on Adult Literacy, and some members of Congress, many Congressional leaders and White House staff have not focused either on WIA or the AEEG Act.

Individuals and groups at the national levels do a pretty good job making their voices heard on WIA, but voices from local and state stakeholders need to be heard in far greater number in the next few weeks if we are to ensure that the House and Senate and the Administration promptly and fully take up WIA and the AEEG Act.

Specifically what's needed is for you and your constituents (and friends) at the state and local levels to contact your federal House and Senate representatives, and the Obama

administration, to make sure they are aware of WIA, of how highly you and your constituents value it, and of the need to push aggressively for its reauthorization and revamping – along the lines proposed by the AEEGA, the National Commission on Adult Literacy, and other leadership groups and analysts that have weighed in on WIA's future these past few months. Your voices can make a huge difference in the outcome.

In this particular exercise, specific provisions in WIA/AEEGA are less important than stressing how critical it is to give WIA a full and serious review with the aim of reforming it. Federal representatives should want to give priority importance to WIA because it is an essential vehicle for meeting the President's economic development goals, the challenge of upgrading our workforce to meet 21st century needs, and the needs of many millions of American adults who are underprepared as workers or potential workers. Suitably reformed, WIA is crucial to meeting the nation's human resource and economic turnaround goals.

The price for not speaking out at this time is that WIA may be allowed to drift on in its current form, leaving us with an outmoded program of the past that falls far short of the fundamental reform analysts know is needed and that so many of us have worked so hard this past year to bring about. We cannot afford to miss this opportunity. A great deal is at stake for millions of adults in need of adult education and workforce skills services and for our nation.

I hope I can count on you to help by pitching in at a critical moment to engage your constituents. Needless to say, if you or they want to let me know about the step(s) you take (gspangenberg@caalusa.org), I'd welcome hearing from you.

Thank you so very much.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gail Spangenberg".

P.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy and Senator Jim Webb have introduced the AEEG Act in the House and Senate respectively (H.R.3238 and S.1468), aiming to revise Titles I and II of WIA and support a major investment in technology for adult learning. It would also help at this stage if you and your constituents could ask your federally-elected reps to cosponsor the House and Senate bills by contacting the key legislative aides to make their interest known: Rachel.bisi@mail.house.gov and Maribel_ramos@webb.senate.gov. (H.R.3238 is available in full at the CAAL website – item L-1 under Links).