



**LETTER ON IMPORTANCE OF
REFORMING AND REAUTHORIZING WIA**

November 29, 2010

**To
Senate and House Leadership
U.S. Congress**

**From 18 National and State Organizations
and Members of the National Commission on Adult Literacy**



Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy
1221 Avenue of the Americas - 44th Floor New York, NY 10020

November 29, 2010

The Honorable Michael Enzi
835 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
120 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patti Murray
173 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Enzi, Harkin, Isakson, and Murray:

We are writing on a matter of great importance to our nation. Specifically, on behalf of our organizations and those listed in the attachments to this letter, we urge you to enact reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), including a robust Title II that incorporates the foundation laid in the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act (to be reintroduced early in the next Congress). A reformed WIA has been inching its way forward in Congress for several years now and needs, as a priority, to be moved to the forefront of the legislative agenda. Our many organizations hope for its passage by next Spring.

We represent a wide array of interests, and are among dozens of other leadership voices that have been working hard to advance reform and reauthorization of WIA. We believe that a reformed and adequately funded WIA is vitally needed to restructure adult basic education and workforce skills development in our nation in keeping with 21st Century needs. Indeed, WIA is essential if we are to produce adult workers in the millions who are able to hold current and emerging jobs, earn a family-sustaining wage, and compete in the global economy. Our Employment and Training programs are not by themselves adequate for the job.

As things are now, America is becoming less competitive every day. Study after study shows that we are losing ground to other countries in educational attainment. Among the 30 OECD free-market countries, we are the only nation in which young adults are less educated than their parents. *Reach Higher, America*, the report of National Commission on Adult Literacy (June 2008), reports that 80 to 90 million American adults today, about half of the adult workforce, lack the basic education and communication skills required to obtain or move into jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy reinforces these findings. The Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts that by 2014, 24 of the 30 fastest-growing occupations will require workers with postsecondary education or training and about 40 percent of job openings over the next decade will require these skills.

Yet, the adult education programs of the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor combined reach only about 3 million adults annually. For the most part, they are functioning under federal legislation written in 1997. Due to lack of a guiding framework and inadequate funding, in many states there are fewer programs today serving fewer adults despite the fact that the need for such programs has grown. Nearly all of the states have waiting lists for adult education services and cannot presently re-engage more than a small fraction of those who have dropped out of high school. Several states, including those listed among the attached signatories, are squarely facing the facts and planning for better adult education and workforce skills services, but all states need stronger WIA legislation to do this effectively and with common purpose.

If the United States is to succeed in the world economy, we *must* invest in our adult education system. We *must* provide our under-prepared adult population with the tools to obtain basic literacy and/or workplace skills, gain admission to job training programs or postsecondary education, get jobs, become self-sufficient, and advance in the workplace.

To achieve the job and education outcomes needed, we need strong mechanisms for coordinating goals and outcomes among federal programs, especially between WIA Titles I and II. We need to encourage true collaboration among a range of partners in education, labor, and business. A reformed and reauthorized WIA should and can do these things. It should also create incentives for business to improve employee skills and encourage states to work more actively with business to increase the participation of incumbent workers in workforce training and adult education programs.

Of special concern in the national effort to reverse workforce decline are services to low-skilled adults, including high-school dropouts, low-income parents, young nonviolent offenders, and English language learners. (Millions of low-English-proficient adults today also have low literacy skills). We hope that the House and Senate WIA bills will both include solid provisions to meet the needs of these and other groups and in the process provide business and industry with the educated and trained workforce they need. It is also important to include reforms that are sensitive to differing realities in individual states in relation to their labor market and state economic goals.

The reauthorized WIA legislation should also provide significantly for technology, as proposed in the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act, including incentives for states to use technology to better integrate and provide access to their workforce skills training and adult education programs.

Providing support to keep us competitive through the education and training of our workforce has been, and should remain, a bipartisan effort. The fact is, the longer we delay reenactment and reform of WIA, the more likely we will fall even further behind. Thus, we hope we can count on your commitment now and early in the next Congress to reforming WIA and securing its passage. Of course, we must not starve WIA before we fix it, so we also count on your support for preserving, even increasing, the funding WIA needs.

Thank you for your continuing leadership. We will be pleased to support your efforts on WIA in any way we can.

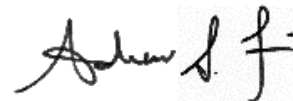
Cordially,



David Perdue
International Businessman
Chair, National Commission
on Adult Literacy



Gail Spangenberg
President
Council for Advancement
of Adult Literacy



Andrew S. Levin
Chief Workforce
Officer
State of Michigan

cc: Senators Sherrod Brown, Richard Burr, Jack Reed, Harry Reid, and Jim Webb

OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL & INDIVIDUAL SIGNATORIES

SUPPORTING LEADERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

American Association of Community Colleges
California Adult Education Administrators' Association
California Council for Adult Education (CCAEE)
Corporation for a Skilled Workforce
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Illinois Workforce Partnership
Indiana Chamber of Commerce
Iowa Association of Community College Trustees
Jobs for the Future (JFF)
Kentucky Adult Education, Council on Postsecondary Education
Kirkwood Community College (Iowa)
National Council of State Directors of Adult Education (NCSDAE)
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL)
Washington Workforce Association
Women Employed (Illinois)

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Morton Bahr, President Emeritus, Communications Workers of America

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John Comings, Former Director, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University; International Consultant

Sharon Darling, President and Founder, National Center for Family Literacy

Samuel Halperin, Senior Fellow and Founder, American Youth Policy Forum

George Kessinger, President and CEO, Goodwill Industries International, Inc.

Cheryl D. King (Study Director), former Dep. Secretary and Commissioner of Adult Education and Workforce Development in Kentucky; currently President of Kentucky Wesleyan College

Bridget Lamont, Vice Chair, U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science; past Chair and current member, Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board

Hon. Ray Marshall, Rapoport Centennial Chair in Economics and Public Affairs, University of Texas; former U.S. Secretary of Labor

Gail Mellow, President, LaGuardia Community College

Owen Modeland, President, Correctional Education Association; Supt of Schools, Oklahoma Department of Corrections

Mark Musick, Chair, Georgia Workforce Investment Board; President Emeritus, Southern Regional Education Board (SREB); chaired Board of National Assessment of Educational Progress under three presidents

Karen Narasaki, President, Asian American Justice Center; Vice Chair, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; Vice President of Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Juan Olivarez, President, Grand Rapids Community College; member, Board of National Institute for Literacy

Camille Preus, Commissioner, Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development; recent President, National Council on State Directors of Community Colleges; Chair-elect of Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education

Hon. Tom Sawyer, Ohio State Senator; former member U.S. House of Representatives. Author, National Literacy Act of 1991

Hon. George Staples, Director General of U.S. Foreign Service and Assistant Secretary for Human Resources, U.S. Department of State (retired July 2007); former U.S. Ambassador to many countries

Gail Spangenberg (Commission Manager), President, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy; former operating head, Business Council for Effective Literacy

Andrew Sum, Professor of Labor Economics, Director of Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University

Robert Wedgeworth, Past President & CEO, Proliteracy Worldwide (retired June 2007); former President, American Library Association

William White, President and Chairman, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation



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1221 Avenue of the Americas - 44th Floor New York, NY 10020

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The Honorable Brett Guthrie
510 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Kline
1210 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ruben Hinojosa
2463 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller
2257 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Guthrie, Hinojosa, Kline, and Miller:

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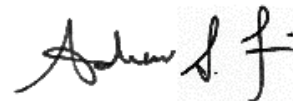
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Chief Workforce
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cc: Representatives Dan Maffei, Nancy Pelosi, Phil Roe, and John Tierney

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