

April 13, 2018

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

Thank you for recognizing the urgent need to boost funding for Adult Education State Grant Program for Fiscal Year 2018. The increased funding will strengthen adult education programs and put more adults on a pathway to greater career opportunities and enhanced economic security. As your Subcommittee considers the Fiscal Year 2019 Appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, we urge you to build on that increase and fund adult education at the authorized level of \$664.5 million included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which passed Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support.

WIOA made transformative changes to our adult education system. Adult Education State Grants support career pathway programs that are a crucial to ensuring that we meet the needs of employers nationally and advance our economic competitiveness globally. There is a new focus on preparing our students to be college and career ready and equipping them with essential skills. Additionally, Integrated Education and Training (IET) models combine academic instruction with occupational skills training, providing opportunities to educate our students further faster. However, the promise of WIOA will not bear fruit unless we invest the necessary resources in our adult education systems throughout the states.

The need for strengthening the skills base for working adults continues to grow. Increasingly, middle-skill and sustainable wage jobs require education beyond high school. Yet, according to U.S. Census, America Community Survey data, 12 percent (24 million) of working age adults have less than a high school diploma. Individuals without a high school diploma are twice as likely to be unemployed, three times as likely to be in poverty, four times as likely to have poor health, and eight times as likely to be incarcerated. Moreover, an estimated 36 million adults in the U.S. have low skills with nearly one in six having low literacy skills and one in three having low numeracy skills.

As a result, the U.S. is at risk of losing the skills race to global competitors. According to PIAAC (OECD's Program of International Assessment of Adult Competencies), Americans lag behind the international average for basic skills in literacy and numeracy and "problem-solving in technology-rich environments." While other nations show consistent progress in increasing the education levels of their adult populations, U.S. adults have not made similar progress. The international Survey of Adult Skills (OECD, 2013) found that our average performance in literacy and numeracy was significantly lower than the international average.

Simply put, we cannot meet our economic goals without a significant and sustained investment in building the skills of working class adults. We urge you to work towards increasing funding for adult education to the authorized level of \$664.5 million for Fiscal Year 2019.

Sincerely,

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