



National Career  
Development  
Association

June 2, 2026

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chairman Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Chair Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member Committee on  
Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Vice Chair Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cole, Chair Collins, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Vice Chair Murray:

As the economy changes, equipping workers and learners with the skills and knowledge employers need—now and in the future—is a national priority that warrants federal investment that is commensurate with the scale of this challenge. We write as representatives of organizations across workforce development boards, state and local governments, community and technical colleges, adult educators, labor and labor-management partnerships, community based organizations, workers and businesses, we urge you to prioritize and strengthen investments in our nation's workforce development and education systems under the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and related agencies for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27).

The economy is beginning to show signs of slowing growth with a growing number of workers who are now on the sidelines. According to the March Jobs report, 17.7 million individuals are without a job, underemployed, or want a job but are not currently in the labor force, compared to only 6.9 million job openings—a troubling indication of growing slack in the labor market.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, increasing numbers of retired adults are returning to the workforce primarily to afford everyday living costs.<sup>2</sup> Yet even as more workers seek employment, 69% of American employers say they are struggling to find the skilled talent they need.<sup>3</sup> As economic conditions continue to shift, workers will need access to education and training to transition into industries experiencing growth. Strong federal workforce and education investments are critical to meeting the demand of growing industries and helping workers adapt in times of economic uncertainty.

Yet the workers who need assistance the most continue to face inadequate access to the foundational skills and support needed to succeed in today's labor market, primarily because federal investments addressing these challenges have not kept pace with growing need.

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Employment Situation* — March 2025, April 3, 2026, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary* – February 2026, March 31, 2026, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.nr0.htm>. <sup>2</sup>Economic Policy Research Institute, *Are Older Workers a New Reserve Army of Labor?*, <https://www.economicpolicyresearch.org/research/are-older-workers-a-new-reserve-army-of-labor>, <sup>3</sup>ManpowerGroup, *2026 Global Talent Shortage (Milwaukee: ManpowerGroup, 2026)*, <https://www.manpowergroup.com/en/insights/2026-global-talent-shortage>

Approximately 28% of U.S. adults have low literacy proficiency, and 34% have low numeracy proficiency.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, 92% of jobs require digital skills, yet nearly one-third of U.S. adults lack the foundational digital skills.<sup>5</sup> As technology, automation, and artificial intelligence continue to transform the economic landscape at an accelerating pace, the need for training, retraining, and upskilling will only grow — making accessible skills training, education, and wraparound supports essential not just for entering the workforce, but throughout workers' entire careers. Federal workforce and education investments can support the programs that build workers' digital skills and create career pathways for continuous learning and advancement.

Chronic underinvestment in the workforce system has prevented the public workforce system from reaching its full potential, which in turn has fueled a flawed narrative that these programs and systems—rather than a lack of resources behind them-- are the problem to be solved. For too long, workforce development has been framed as a "second chance" system for people who have somehow "fallen short" in school or in work and levels of federal investment for the last two decades reflect this perspective. It is long past time to change the message and treat workforce and education programs as first-choice investments that unlock potential, expand opportunity and access, and equip workers and local businesses with the skills and talent they need to thrive in a rapidly changing economy.

Making that shift starts with strengthened federal investments in the nation's human capital. Yet, the United States presently lags significantly behind peer nations. To match the average level of investment among OECD countries, the U.S. would need to invest \$96 billion more annually in workforce development.<sup>6</sup> Rather than closing that gap, the FY 2027 President's Budget proposes eliminating funding for key programs that support literacy, education and skills development for workers with barriers to employment including Adult Education, Senior Community Service Employment Program, and Job Corps. It also proposed consolidating 12 workforce programs, including WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth funding, into a single "Make America Skilled Again" block grant that would cut total funding by \$1.2 billion compared to what those programs collectively received in the most recent fiscal year. These programs are critical to providing access to skills training and education as well as the wraparound supports -- including career navigation, transportation, childcare, and nutrition assistance -- that make participation possible. Future funding levels should reflect actual needs of workers, businesses, and communities, rather than proposing to eliminate capacity at the moment it is needed most.

The American public understands what is at stake and supports federal investment in skills training. According to polling, 82% of voters support increased government funding for skills training programs including 91% of Democrats, 83% of Independents, and nearly three-quarters of Republicans.<sup>7</sup> Support for workforce investments is a genuinely bipartisan issue and Congressional appropriations should reflect that.

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<sup>4</sup>OECD, *Survey of Adult Skills 2023: United States* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/survey-of-adults-skills-2023-country-notes\\_ab4f6b8c-en/united-states\\_427d6aac-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/survey-of-adults-skills-2023-country-notes_ab4f6b8c-en/united-states_427d6aac-en.html), <sup>5</sup>National Skills Coalition, *Closing the Digital Skill Divide in the United States*, February 2025, [NSC-National\\_factsheet\\_digdivide.pdf](#), <sup>6</sup>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Data Viewer, 2023, [Gross Domestic Product, Fourth Quarter and Year 2023 \(Second Estimate\) | U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis \(BEA\)](#)

To meet the needs of workers and employers alike, we call for the following specific actions for FY27 appropriations legislation:

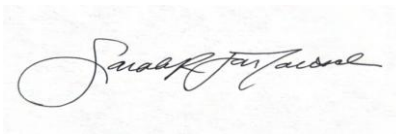
- Provide at least a 10 percent increase above current levels for WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker, Apprenticeship, and other Department of Labor workforce programs.
- Fund WIOA Title I Youth Funding at \$1.14 billion to better support connecting Opportunity Youth to quality training and good jobs and include report language directing the Secretary of Labor to make competitive grants for subsidized summer and year round employment opportunities targeted to opportunity youth or justice involved youth and those in high poverty areas under the Committee's demonstration authority under section 169 of WIOA.
- Preserve Adult Education and increase funding in FY27 to \$810 Million
- Maintain the current maximum Pell Grant and address the funding shortfall to ensure resources are available as the new Workforce Pell program expands access to shorter term, high-quality training and education. Pell Grants are a valuable tool to make education more affordable and accessible for those with the greatest financial need
- Restore funding for the Reentry Employment Opportunities Program to \$115 million.
- Increase funding for YouthBuild to \$130 million to better meet program demand.
- Restore Senior Community Services Employment Program funding to \$405 million.
- Increase funding for Career and Technical Education (CTE) State Grants by \$50 million.
- Fund Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants at \$75 million.
- Provide at least \$40 million for the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) and include report language that ensures future competitive awards intentionally connect with other statewide data initiatives to improve state and local workforce data infrastructure and ensure that the information generated by the public workforce system is more useable for workers, learners, employers, and policymakers to drive continuous improvement and informed-consumer choice.

Now is not the time to scale back investments in the programs that support education and training. We urge you to protect and expand funding through the FY2027 appropriations process to ensure workers can access the training they need, businesses can hire the skilled talent they require, and our economy can thrive. We appreciate your leadership and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Dirk Matthews  
NCDAs President



Sarah JanTausch  
Govt Relations Co-Chair



Steven Thomas  
Govt Relations Co-Chair