

## **H.R. 6655 A Stronger Workforce for America Act**

On April 9, 2024, under suspension of the Rules, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 6655 “A Stronger Workforce for America Act (ASWAA) along bipartisan lines. This Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reauthorization bill was introduced by House Committee on Education & Workforce (CEW) leaders, Chair Virginia Foxx (R-NC) and Ranking Member Bobby Scott (D-VA).

For context, WIOA governs our federal workforce training infrastructure and is the primary federal workforce development law. The 2014 reauthorization sought increased coordination among federal workforce development and related programs. Workforce development programs provide a combination of education and training services to prepare individuals for work and to help them improve their prospects in the labor market. They may include activities such as job search assistance, career counseling, occupational skill training, classroom training, or on-the-job training. The federal government provides workforce development activities through WIOA’s programs and other programs designed to increase the employment and earnings of workers. Community colleges play a vital role in this ecosystem, primarily as occupational skills training providers and classroom trainers, but increasingly help with other supportive services such as career counseling and basic needs services.

Since its passage, ASWAA has been received by the Senate and was referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP). While the HELP committee drafted their version of the WIOA reauthorization earlier this summer and shared this version with stakeholders for feedback, the Senate never filed an official bill or marked up any proposal. Nonetheless, HELP and CEW staffers have been at the negotiating table since this summer to develop a reauthorization bill that compromises House and Senate priorities while also including stakeholder feedback.

As of late November, Democrat and Republican staffers from both CEW and HELP unveiled a WIOA reauthorization bill that is now being reviewed by both chambers of Congress. The summary below highlights several elements found in the latest version of the bill that would impact community colleges.

### **Skill-based Hiring Initiatives**

As part of the Unified State Plan, the bill adds a new section which asks states to report on changes in labor market conditions to the workforce system in their states. In addition, states are to include a description of any activities to “expand economic opportunity for individuals and reduce barriers to labor market entry” by, among other things, “developing in cooperation with employers, education and training providers, and other stakeholders” statewide initiatives

that promote skill-based hiring and examine licensure policies which remove or streamline requirements and interstate agreements to improve reciprocity.

### **Performance Accountability Indicators**

Amends the performance indicators to focus on retention in the workforce after the fourth quarter after program completion (assuming job placement after the second quarter after program completion), “measurable skills gained” after six months of program entry, and effectiveness in serving employers by calculating percentage of program participants that exited the program having completed on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, or apprenticeships.

### **One-Stop Delivery System**

Allows CTE schools and public libraries to serve as one-stop operators. Expands the ability of one-stop operators to provide services virtually if participants can have access to a physical location in which they can access the virtual services. This can be done in partnership with a network of affiliated locations such as community college campuses.

### **Eligible Training Providers**

This bill makes it possible for a state’s governor to identify and grant high-performing eligible training providers the “Workforce Innovation Leader” (WIL) designation. This designation allows the eligible training provider to display the WIL seal in their marketing materials. An eligible training provider’s WIL designation is subject to annual review.

### **Adult and Dislocated Worker Activities**

Requires the states to coordinate with industry and education stakeholders to identify or develop competency-based assessments that measure knowledge, skills, and abilities for the purposes of awarding recognized postsecondary credentials or credit, developing individual employment plans, or skills-based resumes or profile.

Establishes the Critical Industry Skills Fund and an Industry or Sector Partnership and Career Pathways Development Fund using the governor’s reserve and any additional funds reserved by the governor for this purpose. These funds will provide partial reimbursements to employers, sector partnerships, and other intermediaries that have approved applications to upskill workers in the priority industries selected by the state, with a non-federal cost sharing requirement based on the size of the participating employers. Reimbursements will occur only when workers complete their program and are employed and retained in that industry.

Requires that no less than 50 percent of the funds allocated to a local area be used to provide eligible individuals with skills development through an Individual Training Account (ITA) or a contract with an employer or provider. From this 50% floor, no more than 8% can be used for supportive services to eligible individuals.

### **Strengthening Community Colleges Program**

Authorizes the Strengthening Community Colleges Workforce Development Grant program to improve and expand high-quality workforce development programs at community colleges. This authorization is modeled after the highly successful Strengthening Community College

Training Grants that is now in its fifth funding cycle. The program focuses on establishing industry partnerships and prioritizing serving individuals with barriers to employment or incumbent workers in need of foundational skills. Authorizes \$65 million annually for SCCWDG (it's current funding levels for FY24).

### **Job Training Grants**

Amends the American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act of 1998 to repurpose the H-1B fee revenue provided to the Secretary and allot the funding through states and down to local areas based on a formula that allocates one-third of the funding based on the relative number of unemployed individuals, one-third of the funding based on the relative number of disadvantaged adults, and one-third based on the relative number of individuals in the civilian labor force.

These funds are used to provide Individual Training Accounts (ITA) with a minimum of \$5,000 set for each ITA. Once the funds provided under this section are exhausted, the local area must use the funds reserved under WIOA section 134 (Adult and Dislocated Worker Activities) for any dislocated worker determined eligible for an ITA and may limit the maximum amount available to less than \$5,000 if the dislocated worker is not a low-income individual.

### **Workforce Data Quality Initiative Grant**

To assist states in making data driven decisions, this bill establishes the Workforce Data Quality Initiative Grant. This grant aims to create workforce longitudinal data systems and associated resources. Specifically, grantees are to expand the adoption and use of linked, open, and interoperable data on credentials to help students and workers make informed decisions on credential navigation. Furthermore, the Workforce Data Quality Initiative Grant requires grantees to participate in and contribute to a multi-state data collaborative.

### **Reentry Employment Opportunities Program**

Establishes a competitive grant that allows eligible entities, such as community-based organizations and institutions of higher education to implement projects which prevent recidivism among justice-involved adults and youth and increases their training, skills, and workforce opportunities.

### **Adult Education and Literacy**

This bill includes digital literacy as a foundational skill as a part of adult education which can be earned in conjunction with other activities and services such as financial literacy instruction, postsecondary preparation, and/or workforce training.