



June 28, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking member
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking member Murray,

We write on behalf of the Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition to thank you for introducing *The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act*, legislation to reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

We appreciate your commitment to career and technical education and applaud the diligence and determination of Democrats and Republicans on the Health Education, Labor and Pensions Committee who worked long and hard to come to a consensus on this important legislation.

The Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition is a business coalition focused on job training and workforce development. Members include employers and employer associations from a broad range of industries experiencing skills mismatches and worker shortages – IT, manufacturing, construction, retail and hospitality, among others.

At a time of historically tight labor markets and record low unemployment, many of the employers we represent find their growth and productivity threatened because they lack qualified workers. After a long hiatus, the construction industry is roaring back, and contractors in many regions face all the work they can handle. But many report they are unable to bid on projects because of labor shortages, and according to industry groups, the sector will face a shortage of 1.5 million craft workers by 2020. The manufacturing industry will need to fill some 3.5 million positions over the decade ending in 2025, according to Deloitte, and as many as 2 million of them may go unfilled because employers can't find skilled workers. Among the most severe shortages are in health care. According to data analytics firm Burning Glass, there are 1.2 million more jobs available in the health care sector than there are workers available to fill them – nearly 1.5 openings for every ready worker.

The critical challenge for all of our industries: far too often, the skills being taught in the classroom are not aligned with the skills in demand in the workplace.

There is no simple fix for this problem. It will require action on many fronts. But few steps are more important than reinvigorating and modernizing career and technical education programs

at the nation's high schools and colleges. *The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act* can make a vital contribution to the renewal that's needed.

The Jobs and Careers Coalition applauds the HELP Committee for its wisdom in building on H.R. 2353, the House's version of *The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act* and adopting that bill's signature focus on career education that prepares students for existing, in-demand jobs.

We appreciate the committee's emphasis on employer engagement in career education: giving business and industry an opportunity to have input and requiring educators and state and local education officials to consult with employers at virtually every state of planning, launching, implementing and evaluating a career education program or pathway.

We are also extremely pleased by the legislation's focus on work-based learning – grateful for the funding made available for work-based learning at the state and local levels and through the innovation and modernization grant program. There can be no effective career-education without work-based learning. It can be challenging – for educators, employers, intermediaries and others – to make opportunities available. The funding and other support provided in the legislation should go a long way to help.

We look forward to working with the committee and others in Congress as the bill moves forward to reinforce two critical principles.

First, we strongly urge that lawmakers stay focused on outcomes. Among the most telling and important are outcomes that indicate students are making progress in attaining in-demand skills and progressing toward careers – attainment of industry credentials, work-based learning and where appropriate, placement in jobs and earnings. This is the ultimate purpose of career education; these are the best measures of any program. And as employers who expect to hire young people who have been exposed to career education, we hope to see programs held to these standards.

Second, we encourage lawmakers to guard against overly prescriptive requirements for state and local education authorities. Guidance is important, standards and accountability are essential. We are pleased to see the legislation require consultation with employers. But if requirements become too burdensome, we fear that some educators may be discouraged from offering career education – to the detriment of our businesses and countless students nationwide.

We commend the committee on its work. We are grateful to see the bill moving forward. We look forward to working with lawmakers on the committee and beyond to ensure the legislation passes the Senate and becomes the law of the land.

Yours sincerely,

American Hotel & Lodging Association
American Staffing Association
Associated Builders and Contractors
Associated General Contractors
Association of Equipment Manufacturers

Association of Nutrition & Foodservice Professionals
Building Industry Policy Roundtable
Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama
Construction Industry Round Table
Independent Electrical Contractors
International Code Council
International Franchise Association
Leading Builders of America
National Association of Home Builders
National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)
National Council of Chain Restaurants
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