



September 19, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy,

As Congress considers federal appropriations for fiscal year 2020, the Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition urges you to support increased funding for Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act State Grants.

This essential funding stream supports career and technical education programs at high schools and community colleges across the US, benefiting some 12 million students and a wide variety of businesses that hire workers for high-demand, high-paying jobs.

Career education has rarely been more important than it is today, as rapidly changing technology transforms jobs across the economy, requiring greater skill and technical sophistication from virtually all American workers, at all levels of educational attainment. Yet funding for career education lags far behind what's needed to maintain the nation's economic competitiveness and provide opportunity for students.

The Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition is a Washington-based business group 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.

What the employers we represent have in common: virtually all face widening skills gaps. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, some 6 million Americans are unemployed today, but 7.2 million jobs stand empty – often because employers can't find workers with the skills to fill them.

The employers we represent lack manpower to bid on contract opportunities. Others have postponed potential investment for fear that they will be unable to hire the workforce needed to fulfill new commitments. And all too often, when they do recruit workers, employers in our industries complain that new hires come to work unprepared, lacking the skills they need to succeed on the job.

There can be little hope of closing these gaps or preparing students for the workforce of the future without robust funding for career and technical education.

Yet Congressional appropriations for career preparation have not kept pace with demand. The US spends less than one-tenth of 1 percent of GDP on workforce education. Total Perkins funding is lower today than it was 15 years ago. If funding had simply kept up with inflation since 2004, the Perkins state grant budget line would now be funded at \$1.96 billion instead of the \$1.26 billion enacted in 2019.

The Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition strongly supported the *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act* when it was enacted in August 2018, and we urge the Senate to make good on the promise of that legislation by bringing funding levels into line with demand from students and employers.

A broad coalition of educators and employers has called on Congress to double the nation's investment in career and technical education. Now is the time to start, with a down payment on the increase that will be needed in years ahead as the pace of technological change accelerates, requiring greater and greater skill from American workers.

The stakes could hardly be higher, not just for the students who will benefit, but also for employers, communities and ultimately US economic growth.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

Aerospace Industries Association
American Hotel & Lodging Association
American Supply Association
Automotive Service Excellence Education Foundation
Associated Builders and Contractors
Associated Equipment Distributors
Associated General Contractors of America
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Association of Nutrition & Foodservice Professionals
Building Industry Policy Roundtable
Construction Industry Round Table

Independent Electrical Contractors
International Code Council
Leading Builders of America
National Asphalt Pavement Association
National Association of Home Builders
National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)
National Roofing Contractors Association
National Stone, Sand and Gravel Association
Opportunity America
Partnership for Air-Conditioning, Heating, Refrigeration Accreditation
Partnership for New York City

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