

September XX, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C 20510

Dear Speaker McCarthy, Leader Schumer, Leader Jeffries, and Leader McConnell:

As you consider annual funding legislation, the [xxx] undersigned organizations representing workers, workforce development boards, state and local governments, career and technical education (CTE) leaders and practitioners, community and technical colleges, adult educators, labor and labor management partnerships, community based-organizations, non-profit organizations, and businesses call on you to support robust investments in workforce and education to meet the needs of employers and workers alike.

With historically low unemployment levels, employers are already struggling to find enough skilled workers to fill existing job openings. [Recent data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that there are nearly two job openings for every unemployed worker.](#) As federal investments in infrastructure, energy, and manufacturing continue to roll out, demand for workers is expected to increase. [Indeed, combined investments in BIL, IRA, and CHIPS are projected to support nearly 3 million jobs per year. Over the lifetime of these investments, total job creation is estimated at nearly 19 million job years.](#)

At the same time that the economy is showing high demand for workers, nearly 15 million people are looking for jobs or better employment right now. People of color, women, and individuals without a high school diploma are overrepresented in this figure in part due to structural barriers to family-sustaining jobs. The skills that unemployed and underemployed individuals have been able to access aren't necessarily the skills that are needed for existing job opportunities. As technology advances and the economy changes, workers will require access to training, upskilling and reskilling opportunities throughout their careers.

In order to address the skills mismatch, create a more equitable economy, meet employer needs, and support workers throughout their careers, Congress must invest sufficiently in workforce programs.

Unfortunately for nearly twenty years, Congress has steadily cut investments in critical workforce programs which has contributed to a workforce ecosystem that is unable to meet demand from employers and workers today. Instead of continuing the trend of funding reductions, Congress should provide adequate investment in workers and the programs that support them as part of the federal fiscal year 2024 appropriations process.

Specifically, we call on Congress to:

- Pass legislation that funds workforce programs for the 2024 fiscal year at levels no less than those proposed in the Senate appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and related agencies.
- Provide dedicated resources to industry sector partnerships. Partnerships are a proven strategy to help employers within a region or industry identify workforce needs, provide training and supportive services that connects workers with in-demand jobs, and can help to address barriers that cause inequities in the workplace.
- Include language that expands Pell grants to individuals entering short-term skills training and education programs. Pell grants are an important tool to make education more affordable and accessible for those with the greatest need. Expanding Pell grants to shorter programs will support workers' ability to increase their skills and access good jobs quickly.
- Support grant programs that invest in building workers' digital skills. [There is overwhelming demand for digital skills in the labor market as 92% of jobs require digital skills yet only two-thirds of workers have the foundational digital skills necessary to enter and succeed in today's jobs.](#) Workers of color are disproportionately likely to face digital skills gaps due to longstanding inequities. Investments in programs that build digital skills will help prepare workers for existing and future jobs.
- Provide funding that allows institutions of higher education to support career pathways, skills training and education, and supportive services to help meet workers where they are and support them as they move up or change industries throughout their careers.

In order to meet the needs of workers and employers alike and support federal investments in infrastructure, energy, and manufacturing, we urge Congress to prioritize investments in workforce and education. We thank you for your leadership and stand ready to work with you as you come to agreement on funding for the 2024 fiscal year.

[Organizations List Here]