

September 30, 2024

The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Chairman
The Honorable Bill Cassidy, M.D., Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

The undersigned unions write to inquire about the Senate HELP Committee's continued efforts on the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). We recognize the arduous task of drafting bi-partisan legislation and the difficult decisions that result from those efforts. As discussions continue, we urge the Committee to keep in mind the key questions for any legislation: what do we want from our public workforce system and whose interests should it serve?

We recognize the need to modernize our workforce development system. To be truly effective, a workforce development system must prioritize workers' needs, emphasize job quality, and enhance worker power, voice, and rights.

Both the House passed "A Stronger Workforce for America Act" (H.R. 6655) and the Senate HELP Committee draft neglected to include several labor priorities. Those versions contained no improvements in expanding labor representation on State and Local Workforce Development Boards; no changes to the definition of "industry or sector partnerships" to ensure full labor representation; no labor consultation or improved labor concurrence language; and no requirements for priority consideration to funding labor intermediaries and joint labor-management programs. While we held out hope for improvement, these deficiencies in the Senate bill have given us much consternation.

We were very pleased with the Committee's decision to include language on adherence to federal labor laws in the workforce development provisions. The language requires that employers applying for training contracts demonstrate they are in compliance with federal labor and employment laws and disclose any proven violations or penalties. This provision is crucial in ensuring that public funds are not inadvertently supporting employers engaged in illegal activities, such as child labor and wage theft. Taxpayers should not subsidize employers who run roughshod over workers' rights. Yet, now we understand this basic language on protections for workers is at risk of being removed from the bill.

Instead of going backwards, we urge the Committee to stay resolute in prioritizing workers' rights and supporting policies that ensure federal funding serves both the workforce and the public interest. The undersigned unions are looking to support a bill that moves the ball forward on these fronts, rather than oppose a final bill because it fails to make any such forward

progress and pushes the opportunity for meaningful change many years down the road. Please keep working at these negotiations, and find a way to a fair compromise.

Sincerely,

Actors' Equity Association

AFT

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)

International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT)

National Education Association (NEA)

United Steelworkers (USW)

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

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