



Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy
1221 Avenue of the Americas – 44th Fl – New York, NY 10020

Gail Spangenberg
President

September 15, 2011

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C.

Senator Tom Harkin
Chairman
HELP Committee
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2205 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C.

Senator Michael B. Enzi
Ranking Member
HELP Committee
379A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear Reps. Kline and Miller and Senators Harkin and Enzi:

Last week President Obama announced the American Jobs Act to create new jobs including opportunities for the unemployed. Members of the National Commission on Adult Literacy applaud and embrace the Job Act's goals. To achieve several of the most important goals, however, quick enactment of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is essential, and we believe the President should call for this in his efforts in Washington and around the country to advance the Jobs program.

We therefore want to urge that the House Education and Workforce Committee and the Senate HELP Committee use the introduction of the American Jobs Act as the occasion to place the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) high on its near-term agenda, including the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act (AEEGA). As you know, the AEEGA (introduced in the House by Rep. Hinojosa in this Congress) reflects the best thinking in the country on changes needed in our country's Adult Education and Workforce Skills system and we think its provisions should be incorporated into the reformed WIA. Many of these provisions are included in the bi-partisan WIA Staff Discussion Draft pending consideration in the Senate, and we hope for an equally bold WIA bill in the House.

The WIA system works and leaders across the country count on to give teeth to state-level initiatives that are trying to address workforce development needs. More than 8 million workers received Title I WIA-funded services in the last year alone, and millions more were served by Adult Basic Education programs, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and the Employment Service. A robust WIA will not only help address the mismatch between those who have jobs and those who seek them, but it will train American workers for the 21st century economy.

As you know, the United States is mired in the worst economic slowdown of the last seven decades. Unemployment is unusually high – especially for minorities. Many of these American workers have lost jobs in declining industries that are unlikely to return even after the economy has fully recovered due to structural changes in the American workplace. This means that they need new skills and credentials to transition to new family-supporting careers in advanced manufacturing, health care, and other high-growth sectors that will drive our nation's future economic growth.

Small and medium- sized businesses account for the majority of new jobs being created; they especially need the WIA system if they are to find workers with the skills and credentials to fill current job openings and plan for future growth.

Nationally, only 56.8 percent of adults with less than a high school education are gainfully employed. Nearly half of U.S. workers (some 88 million) have only a high school education or less and low English proficiency. Continuing the status quo of underinvestment and inefficient structure in adult and workforce education will hamper our country's global competitiveness and economic growth. Return-on-investment analyses show that what we spend now will come back to us in billions of dollars annually in GDP growth, increased personal incomes, increased tax receipts, fiscal revenues to the states, and savings on incarceration and health care.

Today two-thirds of the American workforce is already beyond the reach of the schools. This staggering number includes some 50 million English-speaking adults who have a high school diploma but have never attended college (many of whom have limited skills proficiency), about 18 million adults who speak English but don't have a high school diploma, and another 18 million who have limited English skills. By neglecting the skills upgrading needs of these people we also harm the prospects of the next generation. Some 57 percent of children whose parents lack a college education live in low-income families, and they are less likely themselves to get education. If America fails to educate new workers from these adult ranks, many of them will become a drain on the economy and so will their children.

A robust adult education system is an economic imperative. Important as secondary and postsecondary education are, it will not be possible to create a workforce skilled to compete globally if we focus only on those levels and neglect the third leg of our educational system, adult education. We need to redirect and adequately support adult education to maintain our competitive position in the world. If we have the will to do this, we are confident it can be done.

Reach Higher, America, the report issued by our National Commission in 2008, called for transforming the adult education system to focus more strongly on workforce preparation. This report is still in heavy use across the country as states face the need for reform and more effective planning. We urged an expansion of capacity to effectively serve 20 million adults annually by the year 2020. We know that the current fiscal crisis makes this ambitious goal unlikely to be achieved in the foreseeable future, but we should take the strongest possible steps at this time that can be taken. At the very least, we need to reauthorize WIA to make low-cost structural reforms that will improve system alignment, increase efficiency, and broaden the goals of service to readiness for college and jobs.

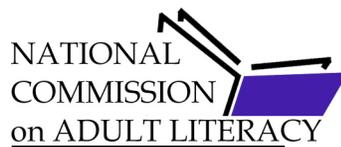
We hope you will seize this moment and that with your commitment and leadership, WIA and the AEEGA will be enacted into law without further ado. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully, and for the Commission,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gail Spangenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gail Spangenberg

Cc: Rep. Hinojosa and Tierney; Senators Isakson, Murray, and Webb



MEMBERS OF NATIONAL COMMISSION ON ADULT LITERACY

David Perdue, former Chairman & CEO, Dollar General Corporation; former chair, National Commission on Adult Literacy; International Businessman

Morton Bahr, President Emeritus, Communications Workers of America

Hon. Gerald Baliles, Director, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia; former Governor of Virginia

David Beré, President and Chief Operating Officer, Dollar General Corporation

Robert Bickerton, Sr. Associate Commissioner of Education for the Commonwealth of MA

Marion Crain, Director, Center on Poverty, Work, and Opportunity, University of North Carolina

John Comings, Former Director, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University; International Consultant

Sharon Darling, President and Founder, National Center for Family Literacy

Samuel Halperin, Senior Fellow and Founder, American Youth Policy Forum

George Kessinger, President and CEO, Goodwill Industries International, Inc.

Cheryl D. King (Study Director), former Dep. Secretary and Commissioner of Adult Education and Workforce Development in Kentucky; past President of Kentucky Wesleyan College

Bridget Lamont, Vice Chair, U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science; past Chair and current member, Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board

Hon. Ray Marshall, Rapoport Centennial Chair in Economics and Public Affairs, University of Texas; former U.S. Secretary of Labor

Gail Mellow, President, LaGuardia Community College

Owen Modeland, President, Correctional Education Association; Supt of Schools, Oklahoma Department of Corrections

Mark Musick, Chair, Georgia Workforce Investment Board; President Emeritus, Southern Regional Education Board (SREB); chaired Board of National Assessment of Educational Progress under three presidents

Karen Narasaki, President, Asian American Justice Center; Vice Chair, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; Vice President of Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Juan Olivarez, President, Grand Rapids Community College; member, Board of National Institute for Literacy

Camille Preus, Commissioner, Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development; recent President, National Council on State Directors of Community Colleges; Chair-elect of Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education

Hon. Tom Sawyer, Ohio State Senator; former member U.S. House of Representatives. Author, National Literacy Act of 1991

Hon. George Staples, Director General of U.S. Foreign Service and Assistant Secretary for Human Resources, U.S. Department of State (retired July 2007); former U.S. Ambassador to many countries

Gail Spangenberg (Commission Manager), President, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy; former operating head, Business Council for Effective Literacy

Andrew Sum, Professor of Labor Economics, Director of Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University

Robert Wedgeworth, Past President & CEO, Proliteracy Worldwide (retired June 2007); former President, American Library Association

William White, President and Chairman, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation