



July 30, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer,

We write on behalf of the Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition to express our strong support for the workforce provisions in the Safely Back to School and Back to Work Act. Job-focused education and training is more important than ever at this time of deep economic distress for workers and employers, and we are particularly encouraged to see the innovative Workforce Recovery and Training Services Act (WRTSA) included in the package.

The Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition is a Washington-based business group focused on career education and workforce development. Members include employers and employer associations from a broad range of industries with enduring skills mismatches and worker shortages – health care, IT, manufacturing and construction, among others.

The economy is slowly reopening, and Americans are heading back to work. But many are finding that their jobs look different than they did before the pandemic and require a new set of skills.

Employees in every setting are discovering that they need to learn new safety protocols to protect themselves and others against the risk of infection.

Other workers will need new skills to keep up with changing technology – the quantum leap into a more automated future that is already transforming industries from health care and logistics to construction.

Still other workers will need new skills to move from a struggling industry to a sector where demand is more robust. From cloud computing technicians to diesel mechanics, many jobs will remain hard to fill even in a slow economy, and unemployed workers from other industries can be reskilled to do them.

Taken together, these labor market shifts pose an urgent question for the nation: where will workers find the fast, job-focused upskilling and reskilling they need?

The employers we represent have an important role to play. So do an array of training providers at community colleges, nonprofit organizations, for-profit entities and elsewhere.

But the vast national training effort that will be needed for a robust recovery will require help from Washington – additional funding and new flexibility in how federal funding is spent on career education and workforce development.

Among the features of the Workforce Recovery and Training Services Act, now Section 207 of the stimulus package, that we find most promising:

- **More training.** As employers, we know how easy it is to see funding diverted to nonessentials, and we strongly support the provision of the bill that requires at least half of any new workforce dollars to be spent on training, not workforce system administration or overhead.
- **More flexibility for employers.** We expect the businesses we represent to appreciate the new flexibility in how Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) dollars can be used to help cover the cost of employer-provided training. We believe this will significantly increase the appeal of the customized, incumbent and on-the-job training benefits available under WIOA.
- **More choice among training providers.** Many of our employer members feel constrained by the limited number of training providers whose costs can be covered by WIOA funding, and we expect them to seize the opportunity to work with officials expanding their states' eligible training provider lists.
- **An employer match.** We believe the employers we represent will strongly appreciate the flexibility afforded by employer-sponsored individual training accounts that companies can use to cover the cost of upskilling by any training provider they choose. We expect many employers, large and small, to be more than willing to provide the required 10 or 20 percent funding match.
- **Funding for certification assessments.** Several of the employer organizations in our coalition offer occupational certifications for workers. Recent years have seen a sharply increased interest in certification in many of the industries we represent. And we expect extensive uptake of the WRTSA provision that makes funding available to cover the cost of certification assessments.
- **Outcomes-based metrics.** At a time of national economic crisis even more than in good times, no one wants to squander taxpayer dollars, and we endorse the provisions of the bill that hold states accountable for their workforce spending.

In addition to Section 207, we are grateful for the increased flexibility the stimulus bill provides for state Perkins Act and WIOA spending and the additional appropriations for dislocated workers, youth, the formerly incarcerated and apprenticeship.

The workforce challenge ahead will require an unprecedented national effort, and this is not a time to stint in investing in American workers.

We support the funding levels proposed in the Workforce Recovery and Training Services Act, and as the final stimulus package takes shape in the days ahead, we urge that it include augmented funding for career and technical education at high schools and community colleges.

Our coalition looks forward to working with Congress as it provides for and incentivizes the essential upskilling push that will be needed as the nation rebuilds in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

American Supply Association
Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association
Associated Builders and Contractors
Associated Equipment Distributors
Associated General Contractors of America
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Association of Nutrition & Foodservice Professionals
Automotive Service Excellence Education Foundation
Chemical Fabrics & Film Association
Construction Industry Round Table
Heavy Construction Contractors Association
Independent Electrical Contractors
International Code Council
National Asphalt Pavement Association
National Association of Home Builders
National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)
National Roofing Contractors Association
National Stone, Sand & Gravel Association
Opportunity America
Partnership for Air-Conditioning, Heating, Refrigeration Accreditation
Polyisocyanurate Insulation Manufacturers Association

Roof Coatings Manufacturers Association

Single Ply Roofing Industry

Gaylor Electric, Inc.

Lupson & Associates, LLC

OEM Fabricators, Inc.

Peak Performance, Inc.

Realityworks, Inc.

Shapiro & Duncan, Inc.

Worley