

February 27, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen, and Ranking Member Lowey:

As you work to finalize Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations, we urge you to support key programs across government that provide data needed to assess and improve human capital development strategies. These programs supply information necessary to ensure that our nation is effectively preparing students and workers, including those facing barriers to employment, to succeed in the 21st century economy.

Federal investments in state data systems, labor market information, and statistical programs are critical for the success of:

- **Students and workers** trying to figure out which colleges and training programs are best at helping people land jobs, continue their studies, or advance in the labor market.
- **Policymakers** who need to know whether education and workforce programs are preparing people for good jobs.
- **Business leaders** wondering whether education and training programs are preparing enough prospective employees to meet their companies' needs.
- **Educators** who want to know the education and employment outcomes of their graduates, so they can continually improve their courses and curricula.

Education and workforce data are essential for monitoring program effectiveness and guiding program improvement, which are all the more important in a constrained budget environment. Please consider providing resources for the following items in FY 2017 appropriations.

State Longitudinal Data System Grants. The Department of Education's (ED) Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) grants and the Department of Labor's (DOL) Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grants have led to advancements in the use of longitudinal data systems throughout the country. These competitive grant programs incentivize state interagency cooperation and are critical to the development and wider use of state systems that can hold education and workforce programs accountable.

Recommendation: Maintain funding for ED's SLDS grants at \$35 million and increase DOL's WDQI grants to \$12 million for FY 2017. An increase for WDQI is important to help states meet the performance requirements of the bipartisan Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Improved state data systems are imperative to demonstrate how WIOA strategies like sector partnerships and career pathways are helping participants obtain employment and enabling employers to meet their skilled workforce needs.

Workforce Information/Electronic Tools/System Building. DOL awards grants to help states conduct research on local and regional labor markets. This information is critical to aligning education and training programs with employer needs. Funding for these grants — included in this line item under the State Unemployment Insurance and Employment Service Operations Account — also funds important national data activities, including the dissemination of information on different types of credentials and O*NET, which collects and disseminates information about occupational skills, knowledge, and abilities. O*NET is used as the foundation for a variety of tools to help workers explore careers, such as the Skills to Work tool from Texas that helps veterans translate their military experience into skills appropriate for civilian resumes and match their skills to job openings.

Recommendation: Provide \$73 million for DOL's Workforce Information/E-Tools to research state occupational licensing requirements and promote license portability; modernize O*NET data on occupations and skills; and create a technology platform that the nation's 2,500 American Job Centers can use to report and display customer satisfaction with WIOA services.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. This DOL agency produces an array of important data, including employment and unemployment of individuals, earnings by industry and occupation, job openings and labor turnover, mass layoffs, and occupational projections. This data helps to align human capital policies with the needs of employers and produces fundamental economic information for public and private decision making.

Recommendation: Increase funding for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). A \$24 million increase would ensure the continuation of major BLS programs and fund a \$3 million survey on employer-provided training, which is currently a major gap in our knowledge of how workers gain skills needed to help the U.S. remain globally competitive.

Census Bureau. Census surveys, particularly the annual American Community Survey (ACS), are critical for providing information about worker demographics, education attainment, and labor market participation. ACS data helps direct more than \$400 billion of federal funding, and provides communities around the nation with information they need to develop a skilled workforce and create new jobs. Recently added survey questions are revealing new information about the value of industry certifications, occupational certificates, and licenses.

Recommendation: Increase funding to support the ACS and other Census surveys that provide crucial data about workers and the economy.

Institute for Education Sciences. This agency at ED conducts research that helps improve postsecondary access and completion. In today's economy, postsecondary education is essential for individuals to achieve their career goals and develop the skills to help our nation's economy prosper.

Recommendation: Maintain funding to support education research, including analysis that informs improvements to postsecondary education.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Advance CTE
Association for Career and Technical Education
Association of Public Data Users
Center for Law and Social Policy
National Skills Coalition
Workforce Data Quality Campaign