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LEGISLATIVE ALERT!

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June 6, 2012

The Honorable John P. Kline, Chairman
House Education and the Workforce Committee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller, Ranking Minority Member
House Education and the Workforce Committee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Minority Member Miller:

The Education and Workforce Committee is scheduled to markup the "Workforce Investment Improvement Act of 2012" (H.R. 4297) tomorrow. As previously detailed in our letter dated April 16, 2012, the AFL-CIO continues to express strong opposition to H.R. 4297.

H.R. 4297 will have major implications for the quality of services being delivered to WIA eligible participants, as well as the overall accountability of the system to disadvantaged persons, dislocated workers, young people, and other populations whose livelihoods have been severely impacted by the Great Recession and continued mass unemployment. In lieu of H.R. 4297, we ask that you vote in favor of the more sensible "Workforce Investment Act of 2012" (H.R. 4227) introduced by Representatives Tierney, Hinojosa and Ranking Member Miller, and expected to be offered as an amendment during markup.

More than ever, securing the future for working families and rebuilding the middle class in our country depends on having access to training, education and skill upgrading, and then receiving the guidance necessary to obtain good jobs that pay well and have family-sustaining benefits and clear career pathways. It must be the primary task of our nation's workforce development system to respond to the economic challenges faced by different groups of unemployed, low-wage and disadvantaged workers. Congress should do so in a manner that preserves the integrity of the system and provides a voice for workers in the WIA system of workforce investment boards and One-Stop Career Centers. To work effectively, the WIA system must deliver widely available services, be publicly administered, and ensure that particular populations receive services customized to their needs. H.R. 4297 fails in addressing these challenges.

H.R. 4297 unwisely consolidates programs and combines funding streams into a single Workforce Investment Fund that would give states wide discretion to pick and choose eligible groups of participants according to the ideological predispositions of their Governors. Such consolidation of WIA programs would eliminate the targeting of resources to workers and communities where the needs are greatest. In turn, a single fund of this type would make programs more vulnerable to funding cuts and pit one group of workers against another in competition for limited resources. In particular, it is essential that the funding stream for dislocated workers be separate and that rapid response continues to be a mandated state activity for which states have adequate resources.

The extreme provisions of H.R. 4297 will inevitably lead to fewer services for dislocated workers and the degradation of services to Native Americans, Veterans, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, ex-offenders, refugees, older Americans, disadvantaged youth in Job Corps centers, and other deserving groups. Such consolidation of funding streams will undermine the accountability of the entire WIA system, enabling states to manipulate their resources in a manner that will result in the neglect of populations with the greatest needs.

We also oppose the elimination of the Wagner-Peyser Employment Services, as proposed in H.R. 4297. The statewide and public structure of the Employment Service provides a useful complement to the much more localized and privatized WIA structure. As a statewide entity, the employment service agency has flexibility to work more easily on a regional and interstate basis and to respond quickly to emergencies by shifting staff from one part of the state to another. Its statewide information system, which has become a central component of local, state, and regional economic development strategies, avoids costly duplication of multiple local information systems and the hoarding of job orders by local areas.

In contrast, H.R. 4227 would maintain the customized programs for different categories of participants, maintain the state workforce agency and its role in providing labor market information and employments services under the Wagner-Peyser Act, and include provisions to ensure that labor-management partnerships are eligible to carry out incumbent worker training programs. H.R. 4227 would also permit pilot projects to enhance the capacity of state agency staff to offer career guidance services and upgrade their skills to conduct employer outreach and job placement for participants. Additionally, while the state WIB board composition included in H.R. 4227 should ideally be tripartite in nature, the bill adequately attempts to address the gross disparities in labor representation on state WIB boards by requiring a minimum percentage for labor and community representatives on state WIB boards.

When considering legislation to modernize the federal workforce development system, the U.S. Congress should take action that respects and promotes the full participation of all stakeholders – labor, employers, educators, community groups, and youth organizations – in the planning, design and implementation of programs. Organized labor brings a vitally important perspective to workforce and economic development programs at all levels of government and the private sector. The “Workforce Investment Improvement Act of 2012,” (H.R. 4297) blatantly seeks to dismantle the role that organized labor plays in the workforce development system. For these reasons we ask that you vote against this harmful piece of legislation and

instead support Representatives Tierney, Hiniyosa and Miller's amendment that offers a more sensible and comprehensive approach to modernizing our workforce development system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Samuel', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

William Samuel, Director
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT