

**STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**June 7, 2023**

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify today. I am pleased to appear before this Committee for the first time to highlight the investments being made by the Department of Labor (DOL) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 budget request to protect workers' rights, advance opportunity, and ensure workers are able to enjoy the economic security that comes from a good job.

The FY 2024 budget request builds upon the progress made under the Biden-Harris Administration. Through this budget, we plan to deliver on our promise to build an inclusive economy – from the bottom up and the middle out, just like President Biden says – where workers are valued and protected, and where they share in the prosperity made possible through their labor.

An investment in the Department of Labor is an investment in our workers and the future of our country. The Department's budget requests a total of \$15.1 billion in discretionary resources and focuses on three themes: protecting workers; investing in workers; and expanding good jobs for all workers.

I recognize that Congress will be working under statutory budget caps for FY 2024, and I look forward to working with you through the appropriations process to ensure that the priorities cited in this testimony are reflected in the final bill.

**Building the Economy by Protecting Workers**

To deter employers from violating workers' rights, ensure those who do violate their rights are held accountable, and level the playing field for responsible employers, the budget proposes meaningfully increasing enforcement against employers that violate workplace safety, health, wage and hour, and child labor laws. In total, the Administration requests \$2.3 billion for the Department's worker protection agencies, an increase of \$430 million above the FY 2023 enacted level to help protect and defend workers' rights. Building on the staff growth of the past several years, the FY 2024 budget requests sufficient resources to hire additional workplace inspectors and investigators who help ensure your constituents – from the garment workers

stitching clothes to the retail workers helping customers buy them, from the warehouse workers packing orders to the truck drivers delivering them to our homes, from the farmworkers and meatpackers producing our food to the grocery store clerks ringing us up, and so many others – are paid fairly, go home safe and healthy at the end of the day, and are able to thrive in their local communities. I should also emphasize that this kind of enforcement is good for business. It ensures that those who play by the rules aren't undercut by those who don't.

I think we can all agree that no worker should be injured or killed at work. Unfortunately, the reality is that in 2021, there were 5,190 fatal work injuries<sup>1</sup> and 2.6 million nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses.<sup>2</sup> This is why the budget requests additional funding to increase the number of enforcement staff in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The additional \$106 million and 432 full-time equivalents (FTE) requested would help OSHA become an agency that is both more proactive and responsive in its efforts to improve workplace safety and health and is better able to help employers comply with the law. The budget request for the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) – whose sole mission is to protect the health and safety of our nation's miners – includes an increase of over \$50 million and 141 FTE, enabling MSHA to hire additional mine inspectors to enforce mandatory safety and health standards, continue existing enforcement initiatives, and conduct compliance assistance to protect miners from getting sick, injured, or killed.

The Department's request for the Wage and Hour Division (WHD) includes an additional \$81 million and 389 FTE. The current WHD staffing level is not sufficient to serve the needs of the nation's workers. Additional resources would support and sustain the level of coordination necessary to execute compliance and enforcement strategies industry-wide and to leverage our limited resources through strategic partnerships. Members on both sides of the aisle have called on the Administration and the Department of Labor to protect against illegal child labor, because our country's economy should not rely on the exploitation of children for cheaper labor. Young children should be in school during the day and home asleep at night. They should not be working in slaughterhouses at two o'clock in the morning and ten-year-olds should never be operating a deep fryer at a restaurant. We simply cannot accept that some companies are profiting from the work of children or the theft of vulnerable people's wages. The funding request would help ensure that WHD has sufficient resources to hold employers who exploit children accountable.

Protecting workers' hard-earned pensions and health benefits is also a priority for the Department, which is why the budget request for the Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) includes a total increase of \$58 million to provide resources to expand the agency's outreach to underserved communities and vulnerable populations. EBSA is responsible for

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cfoi.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/osh.pdf>

protecting more than 152 million workers, retirees, and their families who are covered by private employment-based benefits and its jurisdiction covers approximately 747,000 private retirement plans, 2.5 million health plans, and 673,000 other welfare benefit plans. The request is critical to allowing EBSA to continue its important work in areas including ensuring that individuals do not face special barriers or roadblocks to accessing mental health or substance use disorder benefits compared to if they were receiving treatment for a medical or surgical condition. This is especially important work at a time when America's workers and their families increasingly live with mental health and substance use disorder conditions. These funds would also expand the capacity of EBSA's Benefits Advisors, who each year handle hundreds of thousands of individual cases that recover hundreds of millions of dollars in benefits for workers, families, and retirees. The agency's request includes an increase for the Missing Participants Program as well as establishment of a Retirement Savings Lost and Found, required by the recently enacted SECURE 2.0, to help reconnect retirees with their hard-earned retirement savings. These investments improve economic equity by focusing on elderly, retired persons who often have limited income apart from their retirement benefits.

In order to fulfill the Administration's promise to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, the Administration requests an increase of \$40 million for the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP). This request includes resources for OFCCP's Mega Construction Project Program which removes barriers to hiring and promotes access to good jobs by providing enhanced compliance assistance and oversight on infrastructure projects that have the greatest potential to make a positive economic impact on a community.

Critical to all these investments in protecting workers' pay, benefits, safety and health, and rights is ensuring the Department has the capacity to meet its demand for legal services at all steps in the enforcement process. The Office of the Solicitor (SOL), the legal enforcement and support arm of the Department, continues to experience operational costs that increase faster than their essentially flat annual appropriation; at the same time, SOL faces continuing needs for litigating enforcement proceedings, providing legal advice, and regulatory support. The budget recognizes that without adequate resources for SOL, the Department will be poorly positioned to achieve its mission in any area. To avoid this, the budget requests an additional \$60 million in discretionary funds, sufficient to support 203 additional FTE in the Solicitor's Office.

### **Building the Economy by Investing in Workers**

The Department's request includes \$11.5 billion for the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) to build on the progress we have made to restore and grow the economy following the pandemic. These resources will further our efforts to create equitable pathways into the high-quality jobs created by the landmark Bipartisan Infrastructure Act (BIL), CHIPS and Science Act, Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and other historic investments. Investments

proposed in the FY 2024 Budget will help States and local areas meet the workforce needs of their communities and the needs of industries across the country.

Skilled workers are required to do the work funded through the historic federal investments in our nation’s infrastructure, clean energy sectors, and manufacturing. Because the Department did not receive funding through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, CHIPS and Science Act, or the Inflation Reduction Act, the FY 2024 budget request invests in effective, evidence-based training models that will help to ensure all workers, including women, workers of color, youth, justice-involved individuals, those living in rural areas, and individuals with disabilities, have the skills they need to compete for and fill these and other jobs. Specifically, the Budget continues support for the Registered Apprenticeship program by requesting \$335 million to expand this proven model, in line with the President’s goal to serve at least 1 million apprentices annually within ten years. These funds will have a particular focus on increasing access for underrepresented groups and diversifying the industry sectors involved. The budget request proposes a new \$200 million Sectoral Employment through Career Training for Occupational Readiness (SECTOR) program, which would support the development and expansion of partnerships between employers, education and training providers, and community-based groups to equitably deliver high-quality training focused on growing industries. Recognizing the critical role community colleges play in providing accessible, low-cost, and high-quality training, the budget invests \$100 million, a \$35 million increase above the FY 2023 enacted level, to build community colleges’ capacity to work with the public workforce development system and employers to design and deliver high-quality training programs in communities across the Nation. Finally, the budget proposes to invest \$150 million in the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system specifically for identity verification services for states and IT infrastructure modernization projects to prevent fraud and improve the program’s integrity. This commitment to UI program integrity is augmented by a package of legislative proposals that will provide new tools and controls, as well as access to additional funding, to states to ensure the right payments go to the right workers.

### **Building the Economy with Good Jobs for Everyone**

The American Dream of equal opportunity – that if you work hard, you can make it – has always been premised on having a good job. So, while the budget deals in dollars and cents, it is fundamentally about investments in people—about what a good job does for an individual, a family, and an entire community.

Our goal at the Department is to do more than just talk about job creation and job quality, our work is dedicated to making it real.

The FY 2024 budget request fulfills the promise and commitment of President Biden that all workers should have good jobs and have the free and fair choice to join a union. Fulfilling

this promise requires improving job quality. To continue this work, the budget request includes \$4 million to continue to provide training and technical assistance to agencies; engage employers on strategies and initiatives to improve job quality; and provide a centralized location for information and services on workers' rights under key workplace laws.

The Department proposes additional resources for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) to support a legislative proposal that expands anti-discrimination and reemployment protections to military spouses, who often face discrimination from current and prospective employers due to the frequent and unpredictable nature of military families' deployments and relocations. Military spouses sacrifice daily to support their families and our country, and the Administration is proposing we do more to ensure they are able to enjoy the economic security they deserve.

The FY 2024 budget request makes key investments in the Women's Bureau, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), and the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB). The Department's budget includes additional resources for these agencies' work to remedy the negative impact of the pandemic on women and help marginalized women access their employment rights and protections; promote opportunities for, and tackle the barriers faced by, the tens of millions of people with disabilities; and ensure compliance with labor provisions of U.S. trade agreements and improve global working conditions.

## **Conclusion**

Working together, we have the opportunity to create a more inclusive economy built around the dignity and value of all work and workers. I thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to discussing the Department's FY 2024 budget request with you and all members of the Committee, and I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.