

April 1, 2024

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
House Committee on Education and
Workforce
2176 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Education and
Workforce
2176 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott,

We write to express our support for passage of HR 6655, A Stronger Workforce for America Act to reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) through the US House of Representatives. WIOA is critical for organizations like the members of the Louisiana Opportunity Youth Coalition (LOYC) to help reconnect youth to successful career outcomes. This reauthorization will improve numerous training services, planning, and outcomes for Opportunity Youth and we respectfully urge timely consideration of this bipartisan legislation on the floor of the House. We also urge your commitment to ensure adequate resources are authorized and appropriated in the future to meet demands for services and resources that can be used more efficiently.

Invest in Louisiana and LOYC are committed to advancing opportunities for youth who are out of school and out of work and/or involved with the foster care, juvenile justice, and youth homelessness systems. That's why we are pleased to see language in the new WIOA reauthorization bill that broadens WIOA Youth Program eligibility to include all out-of-school, homeless, foster, and justice system-impacted youth. These are young people we know through research will face barriers and are struggling right now.

Accessing WIOA for systems-involved youth can also be challenging, especially if they are concurrently pursuing their education goals. Replacing the definition of "out-of-school youth" with "Opportunity Youth" and categorically including youth impacted by the foster care, juvenile justice, and youth homelessness systems will allow job training providers to ensure outcomes for young people through meaningful employment opportunities and career advancement while encouraging state and local workforce boards to develop service delivery systems to better reach and serve this population.

We also know the existing documentation requirements to prove eligibility represents a major barrier in accessing WIOA programs and services, especially for Opportunity Youth and systems-involved youth who typically lack access to the necessary forms. We should not be turning away a young person who is striving to engage and work toward a better future because of paperwork. For this reason, we are also extremely supportive of the provision which streamlines the eligibility determination process by allowing youth to self-attest that they meet the eligibility criteria while still ensuring accountability and eligibility in the future.

Finally, the bill would also require state WIOA plans to increase their focus on Opportunity Youth and other young people who may become disconnected from work and school if not

properly supported. We support this effort of encouraging states to go beyond developing and submitting compliance plans by truly producing a strategic vision and plan for serving Opportunity Youth, through WIOA and other programs, and understanding their circumstances and needs.

HR 6655, A Stronger Workforce for America Act, was approved by the committee with wide bipartisan support. Passing this bill through the House is a critical step to build upon WIOA's strong foundation and make efficiency improvements, along with new flexibilities that will ensure better outcomes for states, workforce boards, training providers and more importantly the millions of young people who could be helped on their pathways to careers.

We look forward to working with you and your staff to support the passage of HR 6655 as it moves to the House floor and to ensure adequate appropriations are provided to the programs in the future. Thank you for your work on advancing this important bipartisan legislation.

Sincerely,

Louisiana Opportunity Youth Coalition