



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Robert F. McDonnell
Governor

March 12, 2013

Chairman John Kline
U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce
2121 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Congressman Miller:

As you know, a well-trained and skilled workforce is one of the keys to Virginia being the best state for business. This is reinforced in my conversations with business leaders as we seek to recruit, retain and expand business in the Commonwealth. We have made many reforms during my administration in focusing on K-12 education in the high demand STEM-H subjects, making sure our students are either career-ready or college ready when they graduate from high school, that our higher education institutions are strategically focusing on the core areas for the Top Jobs of the 21st Century, and fostering more innovation and collaboration in our workforce development programs.

However, we need more flexibility in the states in developing a more streamlined approach to the federal workforce programs, and that is why I write to lend my support for H.R. 803 the SKILLS Act. This legislation will strengthen the Commonwealth's ability to create a seamless workforce system through streamlining or eliminating 35 federal programs. This is a goal Virginia has been pursuing for a number of years. While we have created several opportunities for collaboration among our Virginia programs to increase cost efficiencies and form partnerships to improve performance outcomes, the sheer number of federal workforce programs and the disconnect between the federal performance outcomes required of each program, makes state efforts to reform workforce development slower and more arduous than job seekers need and business and industry demand. The SKILLS Act would provide a more transparent and versatile system, one that offers the opportunity to move forward with Virginia's goals for education and workforce credential attainment, and one that will allow governors to better address the skills gap in targeted industry sectors. This will result in more Virginians finding jobs and more Virginia businesses increasing opportunities.


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Virginia was an early leader among states in recognizing the importance of a strong connection between education and workforce programs, particularly the community college system and Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). The SKILLS Act opens further opportunities for WIBs to contract directly with community colleges for sector-based occupational training for adults seeking to retool for the skilled workforce. Given the workforce needs of advanced manufacturers and health care providers in the Commonwealth, for example, additional flexibility to apply workforce funds for training at our own community colleges would be a benefit to Virginia's employers. As it stands, there are now some federally-funded programs that do not allow for funds to be spent for workforce training. In a national economy that is looking by 2020 to two-thirds of all jobs requiring some level of postsecondary education and training, it is time to make choices that ensure that public workforce funds are increasing lifelong learning and the requisite skills sets needed for an increasingly technical global workforce.

Finally, I fully support the 15 percent set aside that allows governors the flexibility to directly address the needs of their businesses and communities. In the past, this helped initiate such statewide education and workforce programs such as Career Coaches, now to be found in over 175 high schools and career and technical education centers throughout the Commonwealth; PluggedIn VA and Middle College, expedited GED and college and career preparation programs for low-skills, low-wage adults; Great Expectations, which is helping foster youth access and succeed in higher education; and workforce pipeline programs to support major industry expansions such as Canon Virginia.

The SKILLS Act will support the vision Virginia has long held of a business-driven, integrated workforce system that places a high value on education and training for a lifetime and career pathways that bring together education and economic development. I ask your support for this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert F. McDonnell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" and last name "McDonnell" clearly legible.

Robert F. McDonnell