



April 8, 2024

The Honorable Virginia Foxx

Chairwoman, Committee on Education and the Workforce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Ranking Member, Committee on Education and the Workforce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of NAF, a national non-profit bridging the gap between high schools and businesses to better prepare students for future success, we thank you for your leadership in bringing H.R. 6655, *A Stronger Workforce for America Act*, to the floor for a vote. We are encouraged by how this bill looks likely to obtain wide bipartisan support under suspension of the rules. NAF supports this bill and would like to see further improvements.

As you know, our nation faces an unprecedented demand for skilled workers which must be addressed through better alignment of our education and workforce systems. As I shared during my Hill meetings last November, breaking down the siloes between secondary education and the workforce to provide work-based learning opportunities to high school students is critical. Employers must play an active role in developing a talent pipeline aligned with their workforce needs.

"This bill, H.R. 6655, represents a crucial step towards aligning our education and workforce systems to meet the demands of our rapidly evolving economy. By providing more flexibility in funding for work-based learning opportunities for in-school students and requiring some internships to be paid, we enhance high school students individual educational and economic prospects and cultivate a skilled talent pipeline that benefits communities and our nation. NAF urges policymakers to continue recognizing the importance of investing in our youth through initiatives in this legislation and we look forward to engaging with lawmakers to ensure a brighter future for generations to come." -Lisa Dughi, CEO, NAF

Opportunities for work-based learning for in-school high school students are essential to ensuring youth stay in school and are connected to essential economic support and services. Reaching youth through career preparation programs in high school can prevent dropping out and supports workforce development. There is overwhelmingly consistent longitudinal data that illustrates the significant positive, long-term impact of high school graduation. Earning potential increases and incarceration rates decrease, helping to break the cycle of poverty while contributing to a stronger economy and healthier individuals, families, and communities.

Current law, however, skews toward funding youth activities for opportunity youth versus in-school youth and directly conflicts with these goals. H.R. 6655 proposes reducing the requirement for the allocation for opportunity youth to 65 percent at the state level and allowing local areas the flexibility to allocate funding according to their needs. NAF supports these proposed changes and the inclusion of



homeless and foster youth as opportunity youth regardless of their school status. But as we have shared with the Committee previously, in addition to foster and homeless youth, we encourage youth living in high-poverty areas and youth eligible for free or reduced lunch to also be eligible regardless of school status.

NAF also appreciates the positive step H.R. 6655 takes toward harmonizing the different definitions of work-based learning in federal law. NAF agrees that work-based learning should be defined as in the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, where work-based learning “means sustained interactions with industry or community professionals in real workplace settings, to the extent practicable, or simulated environments at an educational institution that foster in-depth, firsthand engagement with the tasks required in a given career field, that are aligned to curriculum and instruction.” We hope this common definition will foster opportunities to better align education programs at the secondary education level with workforce training programs.

Similarly, NAF appreciates that H.R. 6655 encourages local workforce boards to align career pathways with the career and technical education programs of study in the local area. In an expansion of allowable activities, NAF is pleased to see the addition of raising public awareness about career and technical education programs through avenues including “public service announcements, such as social media campaigns and elementary and secondary school showcases and school visits.”

There is one key area, however, in need of improvement in this bill. As we have shared with the Committee before, summer and year-round employment opportunities are critical programs to provide work-based learning opportunities to youth. NAF believes strongly that students should be paid for their work. While we appreciate that H.R. 6655 requires internships over four weeks in summer and eight weeks during the school year be paid, we would ask the Committee to require paid internships no matter their length to better engage youth in their experience and allow them to earn an often-needed income.

Work-based learning is a proven way to grow the talent pipeline and help prepare students to be future ready, whether students start directly in the workforce, begin an apprenticeship, or head to a community or four-year college. Work-based learning equips students with the essential skills, aspirations, and connections needed in any environment and prepares them to be adaptable wherever life’s journey takes them. Updating our workforce development system to better support in-school youth and unify federal education workforce laws will ensure our future workforce has the skills they need to succeed, and employers will have the diverse talent they need to thrive.

Please contact Jennifer Pautz, Assistant Vice President, Policy & Advocacy, jpautz@naf.org, should you have any questions. NAF looks forward to continued engagement with policymakers as the bill continues to move through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

Lisa Dughi CEO | NAF