



December 6, 2024

The Honorable Bernie Sanders

Chairman, Health Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Virginia Foxx

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

The Honorable Bill Cassidy

Ranking Member, Health Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

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

Dear Chairman Sanders, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Cassidy 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 advancing the bipartisan, bicameral bill, *A Stronger Workforce for America Act*, that reauthorizes our country's workforce systems.

Our nation faces an unprecedented demand for skilled workers which must be addressed through better alignment of our education and workforce systems. Breaking down the silos between secondary education and the workforce through providing work-based learning opportunities to high school students is critical. Career-connected learning opportunities for in-school high school students are essential to ensuring youth stay in school and stay connected to importance support services. Reaching youth through career preparation programs in high school can further engage students, preventing them from dropping out, which in turn supports workforce development in communities across the country.

NAF is supportive of the changes put forth in this legislation that will redefine out of school youth to "opportunity youth" and will reduce the allocation of funding targeting these populations to 70%. While NAF believes there are additional populations of youth that should be included as "opportunity youth," such as those living in high-poverty areas and those eligible for free or reduced lunch regardless of their school status, this legislation is a step forward in expanding flexibility for youth work-based learning programs funded under WIOA. We hope that more communities can take advantage of programs under WIOA to provide more work-based learning opportunities to youth both in and out of school, which will ignite their passions and identify career pathways for their future.

NAF also appreciates the positive step this legislation 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.



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.

We are grateful for your leadership in advancing this bicameral, bipartisan legislation and look forward to its implementation.

Sincerely,

Lisa Dughi CEO | NAF