

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 21, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

Thank you for your bipartisan effort to respond to the health and economic impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). As you prepare for a fourth economic relief package, we respectfully request you allocate at least **\$15.1 billion to the workforce development system** in the United States to help our country respond to the demands for new workers in key industries and help individuals who have lost their jobs as a result of this crisis transition to family-supporting jobs.

Over the past month, nearly 22 million workers filed unemployment claims, and nearly all of the jobs gained in the last five years have been lost. In addition, the Economic Policy Institute estimates that 19.8 million workers will lose their jobs or be furloughed by summer, and that the national unemployment rate will be well above 15 percent by July.

Although unemployment is surging overall, certain workforce needs are nonetheless growing, from frontline health services to manufacturing PPE and essential equipment, to contact tracing, and there is frequently a mismatch between the skills demanded for these jobs and the available workforce. Although jobs in these industries do not always require four-year academic degrees, they necessitate high-quality workforce training and development. An immediate investment in workforce development would respond to the current demand for these employees while offering Americans meaningful, well-paying careers.

Moreover, we must strategically plan for a post-coronavirus period of economic recovery and make sure workers have the construction, manufacturing, and other technical skills that they need to rejoin an evolving workforce. Economists are already warning that many of the jobs lost may not come back and that the current crisis will only accelerate changes in the economy. By supporting the development and availability of a workforce trained in in-demand skills, we can accelerate the recovery of our nation's economy. Providing these newly unemployed individuals—and those yet to file claims—training and support today will prepare them to transition into new careers and pursue reemployment opportunities as our economy rebounds.

Labor unions, workforce boards, community colleges, community-based organizations, and other groups that provide career and technical education, are ready to support Americans who are in need of assistance, as they were during the downturn known as the “Great Recession.” Congress was also ready to assist workers during that crisis; it increased funding for employment and training assistance by 40 percent. That decisive action helped our workforce development system serve more than eight million people. We ask Congress to once again support employment and training assistance programs.

**Specifically, we urge you to invest at least \$15.1 billion in programs authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, including Wagner-Peyser, youth and adult education, Layoff Aversion Funds, and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, in forthcoming COVID-19 relief legislation.**

Thirty-eight labor and education advocacy groups share our concerns and call for immediate assistance from Congress.

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Thank you for your commitment to developing a strong, skilled, and diverse workforce in the United States. We look forward to working with you on the next relief package to ensure we provide resources to reskill and upskill workers.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley  
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons  
Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand  
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein  
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith  
Tina Smith  
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders  
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen  
Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin  
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth  
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

/s/ Gary C. Peters  
Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal  
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.  
Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen  
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine  
Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan  
Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris  
Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar  
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed  
Jack Reed  
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen  
Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

/s/ Debbie Stabenow  
Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin  
Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator