



April 8, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jeffries,

We the undersigned members of the Jobs and Careers Coalition write to express our enthusiastic support for H.R. 6655, *A Stronger Workforce for America Act*, reauthorizing and reforming the nation's public workforce system. In an era of partisan rancor and congressional gridlock, we applaud the Committee on Education and the Workforce for this bipartisan proposal – an important step forward for American workers and the American economy.

The Jobs and Careers Coalition is a Washington-based business group focused on job training and workforce development. Members include employers and employer associations from a broad range of industries experiencing skills mismatches and worker shortages – construction, manufacturing, IT, retail and hospitality, among others.

The past few years have been a turbulent economic time, but one thing has remained constant for our industries. Technological change is unstoppable, and it is transforming the American workplace, driving increased demand for skilled technical workers. The upshot for our businesses: persistent skills mismatches that hinder our ability to meet the needs of our customers or grow the economy.

Some 8.8 million jobs stand empty across the US today, nearly 450,000 of them in the construction industry alone, and according to one survey, by the Associated General Contractors, 88 percent of construction employers with open positions report trouble filling them. American employers have rarely needed the public workforce system as badly as they need it today and are likely to need it in years ahead as artificial intelligence and robotics continue to upend the economy.

Among the provisions of H.R. 6655 that we find most promising:

The 50-percent training requirement. The employers represented by our coalition struggle to hire appropriately skilled workers, and many business owners are uncertain where to turn when technology requires them to upskill their existing workforce. H.R. 6655's mandate that 50 percent of the funds allocated to any local workforce area be spent specifically on skills development rather than administration and other costs will ensure that taxpayer dollars are used as effectively as possible to meet employers' urgent and growing training needs.

The demonstration grants designed to spur innovation. The employers in our coalition who have tried to make use of the workforce system have often found it wanting – difficult to approach, bureaucratic, hidebound, inattentive to their needs. Quality varies widely, and some local areas serve employers effectively. But others need a thorough overhaul – new thinking, new tools, new approaches and more. Our coalition sees promise in the consolidated innovation grants that will allow some states and local areas to experiment, and we look forward to working with them to develop better tools and tactics.

The critical industries skills fund. Workforce educators, employers and job seekers have long understood that there can be no effective workforce education without employers to provide input on in-demand skills and industry trends. The employers in our coalition are pleased to see H.R. 6655 encourage and incentivize employer engagement by creating a new fund to reimburse employers and those working with them who prepare workers for employment in their state's fastest growing economic sectors. As a matter of good policy, the coalition appreciates this provision's attention to quality and accountability – the stipulation that training providers be reimbursed only when job seekers complete their training and are employed in the target industry. We also appreciate the flexibility provided by this provision – specifically, the understanding that not all job seekers in need of upskilling will meet the workforce system's usual criteria for training support.

The new employer performance metric. As the old adage has it, "what gets measured gets improved," and the members of our coalition have long questioned the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's approach to measuring the workforce system's effectiveness in serving employers. We strongly support the new approach in H.R. 6655: holding local areas accountable for the percentage of workforce system participants enrolled in employer-driven upskilling programs, including on-the-job training and apprenticeship.

The option for expanded incumbent-worker training. Like employers across America struggling to stay abreast of technological change, many businesses represented by our coalition face a growing need to retrain existing workers. Our coalition welcomes the provision of H.R. 6655 that raises the cap on state spending for incumbent-worker training and allows these funds to be spent more flexibly in the geographic areas where they are needed most.

Using outcomes metrics to raise the bar for fundable training providers. Members of our coalition who have tried to use the workforce system have often been disappointed by the quality of the training provided to participants with individual training accounts. We are encouraged by the provisions of H.R. 6655 that streamline state eligible-training-provider lists and impose tougher standards on providers, using verified employment outcomes to determine eligibility. We also appreciate the provision that allows employers to sponsor programs for the list and look forward to working with local workforce boards to improve the quality of available training.

As the Committee on Education and the Workforce recognized, there is still much to be done – the *Stronger Workforce for America Act* is the beginning, not the end, of the change that's needed to create the workforce system our nation needs to remain competitive and provide good jobs for all Americans. But H.R. 6655 is an important start – thoughtfully crafted, subtly innovative and attentive to employer needs.

The Jobs and Careers Coalition urges its swift passage and looks forward to continuing to work with Congress to revamp the public workforce system for a changing 21st-century economy.

Yours sincerely,

American Supply Association
ASE Education Foundation
Associated Builders and Contractors

Associated Equipment Distributors
Associated General Contractors of America
Association of Nutrition & Foodservice Professionals
Construction Industry Round Table
Construction Leadership Council
ESCO Institute
Gaylor Electric
Greater Houston Partnership
HVAC Excellence
Independent Electrical Contractors
Leading Builders of America
Lupson and Associates LLC
Mark Drury and Associates
National Association of Home Builders
National Roofing Contractors Association
National Sand, Stone & Gravel Association
North Carolina FAME
OEM Fabricators, Inc.
Opportunity America
Partnership for New York City
Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors National Association
Spray Polyurethane Foam Alliance
Portland Cement Association
Tile Roofing Industry Alliance
Universal Technical Institute