



2008 Federal Legislative Agenda for Improving Wisconsin's Workforce

Workforce Investment Act Reauthorization

The Workforce Investment Act, originally enacted in 1998, continues to await reauthorization, having sunset in 2003. Federal workforce development legislation should be a bi-partisan effort, as the economic competitiveness our nation's workforce is in the best interest of both parties as well as the American people. WWDA urges reauthorization of WIA early in the 110th Congress to ensure that Congressional intent of the law is maintained. In the absence of a new Act, the Department of Labor has the ability to make, and continues to propose, administrative changes that can be detrimental to the Workforce System.

- WWDA supports maintaining the integrity of the local workforce development system and the private sector-led Workforce Development Boards, a local board led by business, appointed by the mayor and/or the chief elected official/s in the area, is in the best position to create a strategy and implement it based on the needs of the local/regional economy. Local workforce development systems and strategies must be shaped around the local/regional economies and must be responsive to the key needs of employers
- WWDA supports current language that allows flexibility in providing service to both in-school and out-of-school youth. Programs for in-school youth keep those students from becoming more troubled out-of-school youth in the future; out-of-school programs support youth in garnering employment, going back to school, obtaining a GED, or other opportunities to take a more positive path.
- WWDA encourages Congress to increase allocations for universal services to all customers who may not fit in a specific program.
- WWDA opposes full consolidation of funding streams. It does support transferability between the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs, which allows for local flexibility in funding decisions to address the needs of workers in the community.
- WWDA supports maintaining language in regard to the grandfathering-in of membership requirements for local boards that were in existence prior to WIA, and supports eliminating requirements for representation of mandatory partners on the local boards. Establishing management committees that include the mandatory partners provides sufficient representation.
- WWDA supports integrating programs into WIA which address special populations who wish to remain a part of or re-enter the workforce (such as senior citizens, veterans, those with limited English proficiency, and ex-offenders) allowing increased alignment and flexibility in serving these clients.

Financial Stability for Services

Federal funding for workforce education and training programs has generally been declining over the past two decades, despite growth in the U.S. workforce and the continued rise in demand for skilled labor. Beyond providing traditional employment and training services, Wisconsin has taken a leadership role in strengthening the links between workforce development and employer needs.

- WWDA seeks to increase, or at least restore, federal funding for local workforce development areas in order to ensure staff and infrastructure resources to provide universal services to customers.
- WWDA encourages Congress to examine the Department of Labor's excessive use of discretionary and unsolicited grants, diverting funds which could instead be invested in the existing Workforce system to enhance services to job seekers and employers. Additionally, by distributing funding through specific grant initiatives, the Department is circumventing the ability of local workforce development boards to set priorities for their own communities.

Career Advancement Accounts

The Department of Labor continues to promote self-managed Career Advancement Accounts in lieu of current federal training programs. In its 2008 Budget, the Administration proposes taking funds previously appropriated for Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth and Employment service programs, and redirecting them to a single funding stream. The proposal then suggests a reduction in funding and dedicating the remaining allocation to CAAs.

- WWDA opposes the "all or nothing" approach of self-directed accounts and maintains that assessment, career guidance, and on-going support are vital to the short- and long-term success of job seekers.
- WWDA encourages Congress to review data from previously piloted programs which show that a high percentage of funds were spent on support services rather than training, and that the rate of return to employment was not increased under this approach.

Trade Adjustment Assistance

The Trade Adjustment Assistance program is the nation's primary venue to provide income support, job training, and other benefits to manufacturing workers who lose their jobs as a result of international trade. TAA services in Wisconsin are provided through the statewide network of workforce centers.

- WWDA encourages Congress to integrate Trade Adjustment Assistance with Workforce Investment Act Programs and to ensure that resources are flexible enough address needs at the local level as determined by local workforce development boards.