

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Alma Adams (NC-12)**  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development  
*"Strengthening WIOA: Improving Outcomes for America's Workforce"*  
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank our witnesses for being here today.

Workforce development is not just an abstract policy; it directly impacts the lives of North Carolinians and millions of Americans.

As I've discussed with the Chairman, this is an issue where we can come together and find common ground.

And so, I'm encouraged by the chance we have today to make meaningful progress on this front.

The workforce development system is vital to providing our workers with the skills they need to succeed, helping employers find the required talent, and positioning our nation for future economic growth. But, as we all know, significant gaps persist.

The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*, or WIOA (WE-O-Uh), was a landmark step forward when enacted in 2014. It was a bipartisan success that sought to streamline the complex web of workforce programs and improve the accountability of our workforce systems.

WIOA's success uplifts my constituents as well as Americans throughout our country.

In Charlotte alone, the local workforce development board generates an annual economic impact of nearly 225 million dollars and provided services to over 42 thousand job seekers just last year alone.

And none of this would be possible without a coordinated federal investment in workforce development.

But more than a decade later, we still face systemic challenges that limit its effectiveness.

WIOA was intended to address these challenges, but it has become clear that we need reform. Our workforce system must ensure that every worker—especially those without a bachelor's degree—can access good-paying jobs and gain the skills required to thrive in today's economy.

Without a fully functioning system, we risk leaving behind a large portion of our workforce.

We know job seekers, especially those without advanced degrees, face significant barriers to finding stable, meaningful employment. Similarly, businesses are continuing to look to fill openings with qualified candidates.

And so, I am pleased that our Committee has consistently led the way in addressing these challenges and reauthorizing WIOA.

Last Congress, our Committee advanced and the House passed a WIOA reauthorization bill on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis. Then, after the House acted, our Committee and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions reached a bipartisan, bicameral agreement entitled, *A Stronger Workforce for America Act*.

This agreement updated WIOA to increase skills development, strengthen the connection between employers and the workforce system, and put more Americans on a path to success.

*A Stronger Workforce for America Act* also:

- Upgraded the skills of our nation’s workforce by dedicating 50 percent of the adult and dislocated worker funding towards upskilling workers and related wrap-around supports.
- Ensured eligible displaced workers were provided individual training account vouchers with a value of at least \$5,000 to enroll in high-quality, reskilling programs.
- Emphasized initiatives that equip workers with the skills to fill jobs in critical industries and helped the currently employed workforce improve their skills to avoid displacement and advance their careers.
- Increased accountability by reforming what’s known as the “eligible training provider list” to ensure that programs are of high-quality and aligned with hiring demands.
- And codified two important programs to help individuals released from incarceration can transition back to employment and strengthen workforce programs at community colleges.

And so, I’m particularly proud that *A Stronger Workforce for America* also focused on our nation’s opportunity youth.

These are young people aged 16 to 24 who are not in school and not at work. As one of today’s witnesses, Mr. Sainz (*PRONOUNCED “SIGNS”*), notes in his excellent testimony, nearly 11 percent of 16 to 24-year-olds in my home state of North Carolina are disconnected from school or work.

That’s a big challenge for local communities.

That is why it was so critical that *A Stronger Workforce for America* included several key provisions aimed at helping opportunity youth gain employment opportunities and ensure they can receive services at local job centers.

*A Stronger Workforce for America* was supported by a diverse coalition of stakeholders ranging from AARP to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce – and I wish to enter into the record an endorsement letter from scores of youth workforce organizations, including several located in North Carolina.

As my colleagues know, *A Stronger Workforce for America* was on the cusp of becoming law last December.

It was initially included in the continuing resolution funding the government but was unfortunately removed by the Speaker at the last minute, in part due to some misinformation circulating on social media.

Today's hearing presents an important opportunity to get our effort back on track – and I appreciate Chair Walberg and Subcommittee Chair Owens convening.

Finally, I am mindful that we are a little over a week away from a potential government shutdown.

One of the reasons we must avert it is the importance of appropriately funding workforce development programs – which have been chronically underfunded.

While the U.S. labor force has grown by roughly half over the past four decades, federal spending on workforce development has fallen by two-thirds. We must do better.

And so I'm excited to hear from our witnesses today, and I look forward to working with all of you to enact *A Stronger Workforce for America Act* this year and continuing to build a workforce system that supports workers, businesses, and our economy.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.