ED & WORKFORCE DEMOCRATS

OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Workforce
Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Alma Adams (NC-12)
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
Learning and Employment Records Hearing
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us today.

Right now, many of my constituents are facing the reality that the economy is not working for them.

Costs are rising and opportunities are disappearing.

Since President Trump returned to office in January, job growth has slowed to a crawl – averaging just seventy thousand per month compared to the three-hundred and thirty-six thousand per month during the Biden Administration.

To make matters worse, the Trump Administration continues to fire thousands of public servants without cause, putting them out of work and unable to provide for themselves and their families.

As unemployment rises, many job seekers are looking to advance their skills to open the door to new kinds of work.

Today's hearing will focus on Learning and Employment Records – or L-E-Rs – which the Brookings Institution defines as "a comprehensive digital record of interconnected data such as employment, earnings, skills, and credentials."

If L-E-Rs would provide each person in the workforce with a portfolio containing digital, verifiable records of their past work experience, accumulated skills, competencies, credentials, college transcripts, and other relevant information that they could send to employers instead of a traditional resume.

L-E-Rs have the potential to make our economy more efficient, more equitable, and more productive.

Employers are becoming overwhelmed with job applications containing limited information about the candidates' skills, all of which can be hard to verify.

Far too many employers have fallen into the habit of requiring college degrees for jobs that do not necessarily require them, effectively shutting out talented and qualified individuals who have the skills but not the diploma.

Both employers and our economy are losing out on the roughly two-thirds of talented, working-age Americans who do not hold a four-year degree.

Requiring a college degree contributes to economic disparities, particularly for people who face systemic barriers to completing higher education which were made worse by student loan caps included in the Big Ugly Bill.

Some employers are increasingly evaluating job applicants based on experience and skills assessments rather than formal credentials or degrees.

Many major companies, such as Google, Apple, and IBM, have implemented skills-based hiring practices to bolster their workforces. These examples show that when implemented well, learning and employment records have the potential to provide employers with skilled workers and provide job seekers with the tools to land a good-paying job to earn a living for themselves and their families.

But while the potential is great, so are the challenges.

First, our current job market lacks the level of technological infrastructure to support widespread adoption of these practices. While efforts are underway in some states to digitize credentials and develop learning and employment records, these efforts are hampered by low awareness, lack of common data definitions and standards, lack of digital literacy and access, and data privacy concerns.

Additionally, learning and employment records must be equitable and provide opportunities for all job seekers and employers.

We must ensure that a shift to learning and employment records does not enable an infringement on worker rights, increase discrimination, or widen achievement and income gaps. To avoid this, we should make sure learning and employment records are wholly owned and controlled by workers themselves so that they are the ones making key decisions about what kind of information is inputted into their L-E-Rs, what information can be open to verification, and what information can or cannot be shared without outside entities.

These protections will give workers control over important data privacy elements, such as demographic information, and ensure that unethical employers can't upload false or denigrating information about an employee, which could be done as a retaliatory tactic.

Additionally, for L-E-Rs to be scaled up, we should make sure that the data definitions and protocols that allow L-E-Rs to be dynamically linked with other databases and workforce actors are open-sourced.

While employers are leading the way on informing the public about the utility of L-E-Rs, we should not become too reliant on proprietary data systems where L-E-Rs are incapable of communicating to the wider workforce system.

I am encouraged by the bipartisan enthusiasm for L-E-Rs. Today, I look forward to discussing how these new technologies can expand opportunities for all Americans, and how we can best utilize them to connect skilled workers with promising careers.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to our discussion today. Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.