

Bob Wise

Governor of West Virginia, 2001–2005



April 18, 2012

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member, Education and the Workforce Committee
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Tierney
Member, Education and the Workforce Committee
2238 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rubén Hinojosa
Member, Education and the Workforce Committee
2262 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Workforce Investment Act of 2012

Dear Representatives Miller, Hinojosa, and Tierney:

On behalf of the Alliance for Excellent Education, I write to thank you for introducing the Workforce Investment Act of 2012 (H.R. 4227). Numerous surveys and testimonials across the country convey a fact known all too well: those entering the workforce are lacking in the requisite knowledge and skills to succeed in the twenty-first-century economy. This legislation will not only improve the nation's workforce investment infrastructure, but it will support effective programs that reengage out-of-school youth and get them back on a path to academic, economic, and social success.

For the nation, high school dropouts translate into lost human and economic potential and a weakened ability to compete in a quickly growing global economy. Based on March 2012 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for high school dropouts is 12.6 percent, compared to 8 percent for high school graduates and 4.2 percent for college graduates. Even when employed, high school dropouts earn about \$8,000 less annually, compared to high school graduates. Dropouts from the Class of 2010 alone will likely cost the nation more than \$154 billion in lost wages over the course of these individuals' lifetimes. If high schools and institutions of higher education in the United States were to raise the graduation rates of Hispanic, African American, and Native American students to the levels of white students by 2020, the potential increase in personal income would likely add more than \$310 billion to the economy.

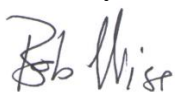
It is for these reasons that the Alliance is particularly pleased with the strong emphasis this bill places on the most overlooked component of the workforce pipeline: the education and training of youth,

especially those who are either at risk of not graduating and those who have already dropped out of school. The Alliance strongly supports the below provisions in this bill which are aimed at ensuring that youth—specifically those who are disadvantaged and disconnected—are prepared to succeed in postsecondary education and a career.

- **Emphasize youth in state and local plans.** To ensure that youth are more effectively represented and served, it is essential that stakeholders who provide or work with youth programs hold positions on the state and local boards and that provisions for youth services be incorporated into state and local plans. This bill achieves these goals by ensuring that youth activities are incorporated into the state and local strategic vision and are well integrated and sustainable in the broader workforce system, and that established performance indicators encourage programs to serve youth with the highest needs.
- **Place specific emphasis on disadvantaged and disconnected youth.** This bill takes important steps to ensure that more disconnected and disadvantaged youth are served by the workforce investment system. These steps include increasing the income eligibility of youth to 150 percent above the poverty line, ensuring that the definition of disconnected youth includes youth up until the age of twenty-four, and that 60 percent of WIA youth funds serve out-of-school youth. All of these measures will help ensure that those most in need of WIA services are identified and served by the system.
- **Prepare youth for college and a career.** This bill ensures that services provided to youth are truly preparing them for the twenty-first-century economy. Provisions in the bill support the development of career pathways, career academies, preemployment transition services for youth, and the inclusion of activities, such as youth internships and apprenticeships, all of which help with the implementation of programs that are coordinated, consistent, integrate the best of academic and skill training, and prepare youth to succeed in postsecondary education and a career.
- **Support innovative practices.** This bill puts a strong emphasis on the type of innovation needed to create a twenty-first-century system of workforce development. This is done through coordination with other key statutes, such as the Carl D. Perkins Act and the Higher Education Act; support for intermediaries that are critical to helping bring different stakeholders together; and through the Youth Innovation and Best Practices Grant that would help scale some of the strongest research-based innovations that serve youth.

As the U.S. Congress moves forward in crafting better, smarter, more coordinated and aligned education and labor policies that truly serve the needs of youth and the nation's economy, the Alliance hopes to continue to work with you and your colleagues to advance these important elements within federal law. Thank you again for your support and work on this important initiative. We look forward to your continued leadership.

Sincerely,



Bob Wise
President

