



April 23, 2012

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Miller:

As you move forward to mark-up and continue deliberations on the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), we, the undersigned, write to express our concerns on the Workforce Investment Improvement Act of 2012 (HR4297). We recognize the need to maximize the efficiency of federal resources in these tenuous fiscal times. However, the consolidation of federal youth funding streams into a predominantly adult focused workforce investment fund will neither improve the efficiency nor expand the quality of youth program delivery in this country. The likely impact will be quite the contrary. As drafted, HR4297 would likely dismantle the current youth education, employment and training system for low-income and disconnected youth. The youth funding streams slated for consolidation in this bill served over 370,000 mostly low income and mostly minority youth. According to the PY 2010 WIA Data book, 72% of those who exited the program went on to employment, advanced training, or postsecondary education and of those who were dropouts upon enrollment, 50% received high school diplomas or GEDs. These youth programs are a lifeline to labor market opportunity for so many low income youth. Many of the local areas have been strategic in leveraging other funding streams and community resources to provide more comprehensive interventions for high risk youth.

Forty-two percent of the \$6 billion consolidated workforce investment fund comes from funding streams that were previously dedicated to youth programming. Yet, the only focus on youth in regard to this fund is the Youth Challenge Fund where governors are allowed to set aside up to 18% of the Workforce Investment Fund for a competitive grant program. The 18 percent is the cap on what can be set aside for youth and there is no minimum requirement. The lack of any serious targets or accountability for serving youth is a clear sign to state and local boards that these funds can be repurposed. We feel the needs of youth can easily fall victim to other state workforce priorities.

At a time when youth employment is at the lowest level in 60 years, when fewer than one in five minority teens found work last summer, when forty to fifty percent of youth in high poverty communities are dropping out of school, we need to strengthen our federally funded youth delivery system and programs to provide these youth with education and labor market options and wrap-around supports they will need to succeed in a 21st century labor market. We need a WIA reauthorization that will build upon the innovation and lessons of the past decade and strengthen the capacity of local communities to rally resources and funding streams more strategically to provide youth with multiple pathways to labor market credentials.

Thus we respectfully request as you proceed with WIA reauthorization that you consider 1) retaining a separate youth funding stream that flows to the local levels, 2) restoring the key provisions of the original WIA legislation related to the strategic role of youth councils, stakeholder involvement in youth program design, and the essential elements for comprehensive youth programming, and 3) retaining the national youth programs which provide important opportunities and supports for our most vulnerable youth.

We thank you for your leadership in moving this essential piece of legislation and look forward to a bi-partisan approach to addressing our workforce and youth challenges. We ask that as you proceed you consider the 6.7 million youth age 16 to 24 that are estimated to be out of school and out of work. They need a system of support with a laser focus on their needs. This reauthorization presents the opportunity to do so. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our

recommendations, please contact Linda Harris, Director, Youth Policy, CLASP, (202)906 – 8012 lharris@clasp.org or Mala Thakur, Executive Director, National Youth Employment Coalition, (202) 659-1064 mt@nyec.org.

Sincerely,

Center for Law and Social Policy, Washington, D.C.

First Focus, Washington, D.C.

Forum for Youth Investment, Washington, D.C.

Jobs for the Future, Boston, MA

National Council of La Raza, Washington, D.C.

National Youth Employment Coalition, Washington, D.C.

Young Invincibles, Washington, D.C.

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FOR YOUTH

Housed at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), the Campaign for Youth is an alliance of organizations who are concerned about the persistence, yet seeming invisibility, of the challenges confronting more than 6.7 million young people in this nation who are disconnected from education, employment and opportunity. Established in 2002 by the leadership of national youth serving organizations, the Campaign for Youth's mission is to build a united voice for disadvantaged and disconnected youth in this nation, and to build a constituency for action. For more information about the Campaign for Youth, please visit www.campaignforyouth.org or email kbird@clasp.org.