

March 5, 2013

The Honorable John Kline  
Chair  
Committee on Education and the Workforce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Education and the Workforce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and  
Workforce Training  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rubén Hinojosa  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and  
Workforce Training  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Miller, Chairwoman Foxx, and Ranking Member Hinojosa:

On behalf of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—I strongly urge you to oppose the “Supporting Knowledge and Investing in Lifelong Skills (SKILLS) Act” (H.R. 803) and to support the “Workforce Investment Act of 2013” (H.R. 798).

H.R. 803 would severely reduce the public workforce investment system’s ability to provide the targeted and intensive workforce preparation services that both job-seekers and employers need the most. The strength of the U.S. economy is intrinsically linked to the strength of the Latino workforce; currently 15% of workers, Latinos will account for fully one-third of the labor force by 2050. But there is ample evidence that one-size-fits-all workforce programs have a tendency to ‘cream,’ focusing limited resources on those workers most ready for employment; less than half of those currently receiving intensive services or training under the Workforce Investment Act are low-income. Without direction to focus on workers who need intensive services—such as Latinos with limited basic education or English skills—our workforce investment system has tended to prioritize a high volume of job placements that require limited intervention. H.R. 803 would exacerbate this through measures to:

- Eliminate the priority of service provision for low income individuals and public assistance recipients.
- Eliminate entirely designated funding for services to low-income youth.

- Shortchanges low-income Latino populations by opening the door for states to use “super-waivers” to roll other federal programs that serve our most vulnerable into the same undifferentiated pot—including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Vocational Rehabilitation services, and the Community Services Block Grant, among others.
- Require that states set aside just 2 percent of formula funds for services for individuals with barriers to employment, a substantial drop from the already inadequate resources devoted to those job-seekers.
- Remove the requirement to include a range of community stakeholders as board members.

The goal of improving our workforce investment system’s efficiency can be accomplished without tearing it down. An alternative proposal, the “Workforce Investment Act of 2013” (H.R. 798), would strengthen the system’s relevance in the new economy while ensuring that Latino and other groups of high-needs workers receive services through measures to:

- Reward meaningful service to low-skilled individuals attaining “measurable basic skill gains.”
- Ensure that services meet businesses’ needs by emphasizing sector-based approaches and acquisition of industry-recognized credentials.
- Encourage system alignment and efficiency through coordination among programs providing adult education, job training, postsecondary education, and supportive services.

NCLR urges you to oppose H.R. 803, which eliminates crucial workforce programming that serves the fastest-growing segment of the workforce—Latinos. Alternatively, we urge you to support H.R. 798, which encourages strategic and intensive workforce development that meets both workers’ and businesses’ needs.

Sincerely,



Eric Rodriguez  
Vice President  
Office of Research, Advocacy, and Legislation