

## Comments for the U.S. House Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training

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Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Hinojosa, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Scott Ralls, and I am President of the North Carolina Community College System. This year, I also serve as Chair of the National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges, and have previously served as a president of a local North Carolina community college and as the state administrator of federal workforce funds under the then Job Training Partnership Act. I am also on the Board of Directors of *Rebuilding America's Middle Class* (RAMC), a coalition promoting the vital role community colleges play in serving Americans.

Less than two weeks ago, the President was in Asheville, North Carolina, the day after the State of the Union Address, touring one of our state's newest advanced manufacturing facilities, Linamar. He was particularly taken with the story of his tour guide, Jeff Brower, later nicknamed by the media as "Jeff the Machinist," who the President noted found opportunity at Linamar after a decade in the trucking industry. One year earlier, a North Carolinian named Jackie Bray sat by the First Lady during the State of the Union address as the President made note of her transition from the ranks of the unemployed to a new job making gas turbines at Charlotte's Siemens Energy Hub. And a year earlier than that, Kathy Proctor of Winston-Salem was referenced in one press account as the star of the 2011 State of the Union, for her "that's me" response when, while sitting in the gallery, the President commented on her journey from dislocated furniture worker into the new world of biotechnology.

Each of these hard working North Carolinians experienced very unique moments of recognition, but they also shared a common experience available to thousands of North Carolinians each year: the opportunity to gain new skills and a new career through education and job training at one of our 58 community colleges. From the trucking industry to advanced manufacturing, packaging to energy, furniture to biotechnology, the opportunity to move from one sector of the economy to better opportunities in another hinges on the access and opportunity presented by education and advanced job training.

Unfortunately, as important as education and advanced job training are to rebuilding our economy, the Workforce Investment Act - our nation's primary program intended to provide such training – is simply not keeping up to the needs of our employers or the men and women this system was designed to serve.

This Act, which has not been reauthorized since 1998, provides too few training opportunities, is overly prescriptive and bureaucratic, and creates barriers to aligning with other federal programs.

Making training a priority will mean dedicating additional resources to it, no doubt a difficult challenge in an environment marked by the scarcity of resources. That is why it is also important that reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act streamlines programs, limits administrative overhead,

and enables state and local flexibility to design systems that meet the legislative goals in the most effective and efficient manner. Simplifying the system and moving past the myriad of multiple program titles and funding streams is a fundamental step. At the state and local levels, these different program streams often lead to the same delivery sources, but require additional administrative oversight, diverting dollars from valuable direct services such as training.

That is why I believe it is past time to reauthorize and reexamine the Workforce Investment Act in a way that addresses each of these issues. To that end, I am encouraged by legislation introduced by you, Chairwoman Foxx and others on this Committee, which proposes many critical changes toward meeting these objectives.

In particular, we support provisions that:

- Place a renewed emphasis on job training by requiring minimum amounts of funding targeted toward training;
- Restructure the cumbersome current sequence of services that puts training at the end of the list and instead ensure individuals will have the opportunity to receive training immediately;
- Allow local boards to contract directly with community colleges for the provision of training designed to serve large groups of individuals;
- Allow states to streamline the eligibility of training providers, including community colleges; and,
- Promote the development of educational pathways from high school through postsecondary education with more “on and off” ramps so students and transitioning workers can gain interim credentials with real value in the labor market.

I’m also pleased your bill takes important steps toward streamlining programs and eliminating overly prescriptive provisions which have hampered the ability for states and local communities to create the high performing workforce systems so desperately needed.

At the state level in North Carolina, simplifying and streamlining has been the recent goal in creating a more effective workforce delivery system. Previously separate management structures for Wagner - Peyser and Workforce Investment Act funds have been consolidated, new performance measures across workforce programs are being created, alignment between community college and public school Career Technical Education pathways are being tightened, and the State Workforce Investment Board was reduced from 38 to 25 members with particular emphasis placed on maintaining strong business-based leadership. Our new governor, Pat McCrory, is placing great emphasis on closing the skills gap to better meet the needs of our citizens who need employment and our businesses that need skilled employees. The changes you have proposed will further this goal and create more opportunity to strengthen our state workforce system.

In North Carolina, we have seen the benefits of collaboration across workforce system providers and joint efforts to increase opportunities for accelerated training in demand occupations. When the recession hit North Carolina hard in 2008, we began thinking hard about where the jobs would be when

recovery began and the skills training that could be accelerated to trampoline folks back into the workforce in less than six months. We developed a training model that combined training for in-demand industry certifications, Career Readiness Certifications using the ACT WorkKeys tools, and employability skills training such as interviewing, resume writing, time management and communications.

Our accelerated job training model continues at community colleges across our state, and three weeks ago, I saw its practical benefits in a very real and personal way. I visited the Workforce Certification Academy operated by Piedmont Community College at a small community center in the rural town of Roxboro, North Carolina. There I met Linda Weaver, a woman in her mid-50s, who shared a story similar to Jeff, Jackie and Kathy. Linda had lost her job in the construction industry and was facing homelessness. In her local newspaper, she read about the accelerated manufacturing training program and signed up. Within a couple of months she had earned her Manufacturing Skills Standards Council Certified Production Technician certificate endorsed by the National Association of Manufacturers, a Gold-level Career Readiness Certificate, and applied for a job. At first, she was kicked out of initial employment consideration because of her credit history, and that's when the program director jumped in to convince the local manufacturer that with the skills Linda had demonstrated through her competency-based certificates, they would be crazy not to hire her. So they did, and one year later, she's doing great. She has even received a \$2 an hour raise. "This program saved my life," she whispered to me that day, as she hugged my neck.

Madam Chair, Ranking Member Hinojosa, and members of the subcommittee, I am hopeful that this Congress will have the will and determination to finally achieve a reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act this year.

In doing so, I strongly urge that it be streamlined and improved so that job training and community colleges are a more integral part of our nation's vitally important efforts to ensure that each and every Linda, Jeff, Jackie, and Kathy out there have opportunity to receive the education and skills necessary to get and keep a good job.

Thank you.