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April 22, 2024

The Honorable Alex Padilla
U.S. Senate
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Laphonza Butler
U.S. Senate
G10 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 25010

RE: H.R. 6655 (Foxx) - Proposed WIOA Reauthorization Provisions - CONCERNS

Dear Delegates,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors, in lockstep with the California Workforce Association (CWA), to express our profound concerns regarding the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act reauthorization bill, also known as the "Stronger Workforce for America Act" (H.R. 6655). The Kern, Inyo, and Mono Counties Consortium Workforce Development Board works tirelessly to develop job opportunities, establish a qualified workforce, and provide training and education that lead to employment. A highly skilled, diverse, and innovative workforce sustains thriving industries.

H.R. 6655 presents several significant changes aimed at improving the efficacy and impact of workforce development services across the country. However, certain mandates have raised concerns amongst workforce development boards across the state.

Kern's primary concerns include:

- **Mandated Training Requirement:** The legislation requires that local workforce development boards allocate a minimum of 50% of their funding to direct training activities. This requirement poses a significant challenge, as it may restrict our capacity to adapt to the evolving needs of local employers and job seekers. It is essential to maintain flexibility in our workforce development strategies to ensure they are responsive and tailored to local community needs.

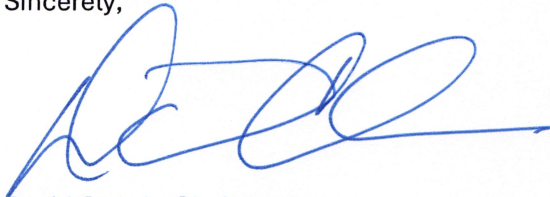
Additionally, California has instituted a 30% training set aside requirement for local boards in order to increase the number of individuals being enrolled in training. This has not worked. If the goal of the 50% set aside is to increase the number of individuals accessing training, it will not work.

- **Expansion of the Governor's Critical Industries Fund:** The proposal to increase the Governor's set-aside fund to support a "critical industries fund" is concerning due to the potential reduction of resources available to local workforce development systems. While the intention to prioritize critical sectors is commendable, this approach risks undermining the effectiveness of existing local services. It is crucial that funding is preserved to meet the distinctive needs of local communities, supporting a diverse array of job seekers and businesses.
- **Redesignation of Local Workforce Development Areas:** The suggested redesignation of local workforce development areas threatens to weaken local governance and stifle innovation. Ensuring that local voices and insights guide these strategies is crucial for fostering programs that genuinely respond to business needs. Local expertise and engagement are key to creating effective, employer-responsive programs.

We recognize there are good intentions behind this proposed legislation, however we are concerned that these provisions may inadvertently stifle local autonomy and flexibility, which are critical for an adaptive and effective workforce development system. Implementing these mandates means reducing resources available to jobseekers, businesses, and the community at large.

Kern County appreciates your attention to these issues and thanks you for considering the potential impacts of this legislation. We would like to work with your offices to craft sensible amendments to this bill that will provide the flexibility and resources local workforce development systems need to thrive and benefit our communities. Please contact our Chief Workforce Development Officer, Aaron Ellis at aarone@kerncounty.com should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



David Couch, Chairman
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: California Workforce Association
National Association of Counties
Carpi & Clay