April 3, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Republican Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the national public workforce system, the more than 500 workforce development boards, and the 2,500+ American Jobs Centers, the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) is requesting your assistance for the growing pandemic emergency.

The COVID-19 public health and economic emergency has impacted Americans in every state, region, and locality. The scale and ramifications are still largely unknown, but it is becoming clear the impact is worse than original projections. Through conversations with local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) working on the ground in communities across the country, it is apparent the demand that local areas will face now and in the future is growing to unprecedented levels. Early reports suggest the economic carnage will be significant, and the fallout might be long-lived. WDBs and other stakeholders in the workforce development system are rising to the challenge as “frontline responders” in this economic crisis for those individuals and businesses seeking immediate help while also providing long-term career guidance and assistance for workers and business alike. Congress must ensure local WDBs can remain agile and operate at peak capacity to help the U.S. labor force either retain employment or reduce their period of unemployment, while at the same time, providing business with the skilled labor force it needs.

There are numerous examples of local workforce development staff who are working, in some cases having volunteered, alongside Wagner-Peyser staff to answer questions about unemployment benefits, complete claim forms, institute virtual career counseling and case management for individuals, and to conduct virtual job fairs for companies that are in critical industries and still have hiring needs. In Michigan, over 300 American Job Center staff have been cross trained to assist in taking UI claims, the same is true in Mississippi, and local areas all over the country. Here are firsthand accounts of how the field is reacting to this crisis:

“We are committed to providing our community with the resources they need in this difficult time. Recently we have begun staffing for the reopening of Community Hospital Long Beach in an effort to assist those affected by #COVID19.”—Pacific Gateway

“While most of our workforce system staff are working in a remote capacity, they have remained committed to our mission of responding to business needs and increasing economic opportunity for all Philadelphia residents. With the full support of PA CareerLink® Philadelphia, Philadelphia Works has developed a Transitional Jobs Program that will enable us to pay 100% of the wages for 400 workers
to assist in citywide food distribution and to support the District’s efforts to inventory and distribute over 100,000 pieces of computer equipment so students can participate in distance learning” – Philadelphia Works

“We are working hard to serve our community during the ongoing #covid19 public health emergency by mobilizing our system to move services online and connect businesses and job seekers with community resources.” - Workforce Development Council Spokane

“#COVID19 won’t stop the important work we’re doing for businesses and workers in our community. We’re adapting to the current situation by continuing our work for you, remotely. You can contact us via phone.” - South Bay Workforce Investment Board

“In these challenging times, we continue to serve our community’s businesses and workers by ensuring impacted workers and businesses can access to essential resources and info.” - Workforce Solutions Capital Area

To ensure that American workers can speedily return to work, American businesses can return economic strength, NAWB urges Congress to take the following actions immediately in COVID-19 response legislation:

**Appropriate an additional $9.25 billion for WIOA funding.**

- With extensive consultation of local WDBs and consideration of the “The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act” passed during the financial crisis of 2008, NAWB recommends an additional $9.25 billion be appropriated through WIOA formula funds for use through 6/30/23 to be added to current appropriated WIOA formula funds as follows:
  - $2.5 billion for Adult Employment and Training Activities, including paid work experience up to the average of the hours worked per week in the last quarter increase from 20% to 40% from support of incumbent workers, and supportive services; including assistance to non-employer attached workers.
  - $2.5 billion for Youth Workforce Investment Activities including summer and paid experience for youth to age 24 consistent with WIOA regulations, and reducing the percent for out-of-school youth services from 75% to 50% provided the increase in funds for in-school youth are used to support the establishment of partnerships between local WDBs and public schools to provide enhanced career guidance, including the allowance of career services delivery in schools by WIOA funded staff.
  - $2.5 billion for State Dislocated Worker Grants.
  - $500 million for National Dislocated Worker Grants.
  - $300 million Senior Community Service Employment Programs.
  - $500 million for Job Corps.
  - $250 million for YouthBuild.
  - $200 million for Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers and Native American Programs.
  - NAWB believes critical related workforce programs should receive much needed additional funding including:
    - Competitive grants for reemployment programs targeting long-term unemployed workers.
    - Re-employment services through Wagner-Peyser programming.
Ensure local WDBs can move swiftly to maximize impact

NAWB is prepared to work with Congress and the Employment Training Administration to assist local WDBs as they help to return the U.S. and regional economies to a sustainable pathway.

Thankfully, the existing public workforce development system is an effective infrastructure that is already in place to help the U.S. worker and economy recover from this crisis, whether those recovery efforts are needed today, tomorrow, or years down the line. It is up to Congress to bolster this system and provide it with the support necessary to ensure a rapid thorough response to the millions of Americans effected by the economic fallout from COVID-19.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with and questions and we stand ready to assist as future stimulus legislation makes its way through Congress.

Sincerely,

Ronald D. Painter
President & CEO
National Association of Workforce Boards