



National Coalition For Literacy

Testimony of

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Before the

Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness

May 5, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit to the Subcommittee the views of the National Coalition for Literacy on the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act, particularly Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. The National Coalition for Literacy represents 26 national organizations concerned with adult literacy. We have spent many hours reviewing current law and developing a reauthorization proposal.

As you are aware, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy found that there are approximately 93 million adults in the United States who do not possess the literacy skills to reach their full potential. Thirty million of those individuals have such low levels of literacy that it impedes their ability to fully function at home, at work, and in society in general. These individuals are very likely to live in poverty, experience complex health problems, and have extreme difficulty supporting their children's education.

Taking into consideration combined federal, state and local funding complimented by philanthropic funding from a variety of sources, the adult education system has the capacity to serve approximately two and a half million of these individuals each year.

Adults come to adult education programs searching for the skills that will allow them to get a job with a family-sustaining wage, earn a promotion, leave the welfare rolls, learn to speak English, read to their children and help them with their homework, transition to postsecondary education, etc. Their goals are varied as are the providers through which they seek services. Providers include community based organizations, libraries, schools, community colleges and other eligible providers receiving federal funds. The diversity of these providers is one of the strengths of the adult education system: multiple providers offer services to a diversity of learners in various settings that meet learners' needs. We strongly advocate for the ability of eligible applicants to continue to apply and compete for federal dollars.

The ultimate goal of adult education students is to improve their lives and those of their families. It is the intention of the proposal set forth by the National Coalition for Literacy to improve the quality of services provided to participants so they can achieve their goals.

The Coalition's full proposal has been shared with Subcommittee staff. However, we would like to use this opportunity to highlight our most critical issues and encourage you to address them in the final legislation approved by this Committee and, ultimately, by Congress.

1. *The Coalition supports a separate line item to support operation of one stop delivery systems.*

Adult education programs have limited administrative funds. Tapping funds from one under-funded provider to help pay administrative costs of the one stop system is not the answer. Taking these funds can seriously hamper the ability of small states to effectively administer programs in their state. A separate line item for One Stop infrastructure will facilitate, not hinder, collaboration.

2. *The Coalition supports returning state leadership to a funding level of 15%.*

Restoration of the State Leadership capacity will enable states to meet performance standards, assessment standards, accountability goals and program quality goals.

Prior to the implementation of WIA in 1998, adult education was required to spend a minimum of 15% of state grants to prepare and support teachers and provide other program improvement activities. In 1998, WIA incorporated performance measures, increased accountability, and added program improvement requirements while reducing funds available for professional development and program improvement initiatives that are needed to incorporate those changes. WIA reduced state leadership funds to a maximum of 12.5%--fewer dollars with greater demand for professional development, program evaluation, and accountability. Adult education programs operate with primarily part-time staff, and experience high staff turnover. States need additional resources to comply with program requirements, particularly in meeting the professional development needs necessary to ensure that well-trained staff can provide high quality services to participants.

3. *The Coalition supports eliminating incentive grants allowing those funds to be added to the formula grants to the states. If incentive grants are to be continued, we support uncoupling incentive grants and including a separate incentive grant program in Title II.*

There is a high demand for adult education services, with waiting lists in almost every state. Taking critical service dollars from states for incentive grants is unwise, particularly when many states do not benefit from incentive grant funds. For example, in program year 2006-2007 twenty-four (24) state adult education programs met or exceeded their performance standards but were unable to benefit from the incentive grants because their Title I partners did not meet their performance standards.

Furthermore, many states do not benefit from incentive grant funds even if they are returned to the state—the funds are sent to partner agencies.

If incentive grants must be maintained, at least they should be uncoupled from partner agencies. Uncoupling incentive grants will reward state adult education services that work hard and meet their performance standards.

4. *The Coalition supports the creation of a research center within the National Institute for Literacy.*

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) decided in 2007 to discontinue funding the only national research center on adult literacy. With most research within the Department of Education focused on K-12 education, this was a major loss for the adult education field. In an era where there is an increased focus on using instruction based on scientifically-based research and accountability for performance, the IES decision places adult education, with limited research, at a distinct disadvantage. We are, therefore,

proposing to fund a research center through the National Institute for Literacy. This center will equip the field with the research it requires to continually improve instruction and produce better outcomes for students.

5. The Coalition supports focusing the work of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) on adult education.

The National Institute for Literacy was created to bring desperately needed resources to the adult education field. The field has grown to rely on NIFL's support and services, particularly since adult education has limited federal resources to meet its broad-based needs. In recent years, based on work performed by NIFL under No Child Left Behind, NIFL has expanded its work to include K-12 education, even though there are numerous resources for K-12 throughout the Department of Education. NIFL must be allowed to turn its attention to its responsibilities under federal law, adult education and family literacy.

6. The Coalition supports a Special Rule addressing issues which arise when the chief executive officer responsible for adult education is constitutionally separate from the Governor.

In some states the chief executive officer responsible for adult education is constitutionally separate from the Governor. Therefore, WIA provisions that grant the Governor certain authority need a special rule in those cases. We support the inclusion of a Special Rule that accommodates those constitutional cases wherein the chief executive officer will consult with the Governor on matters related to the WIA delivery system.

7. The Coalition supports making adult education a mandatory partner on State Workforce Investment Boards.

As the State Workforce Investment Board makes decisions affecting adult education programs within each state, there should be an individual on the Board with firsthand knowledge of adult education programs, their operations within the state, the population they serve, and options for coordinating services for undereducated adults. Only 5 adult education state directors serve on state WIBs. State Superintendents (22), Community College Presidents (5) and others (15) represent adult education (USDOE, 2005). Agency heads such as State Superintendents and Community College Presidents that are familiar with the details of every individual program under their purview are rare. Familiarity with the details of adult education is essential to capitalizing on opportunities to develop critical partnerships and improve comprehensive services for undereducated adults. By sitting on the state WIB, the state director of adult education can avail the agency of those opportunities.

8. The Coalition proposes codifying the EL/Civics Program as part of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act.

At the present time, the EL/Civics program exists on a year-to-year basis through the appropriations process. The EL/Civics Program addresses the needs of a rapidly increasing portion of those adults in need of adult education services. Individuals in need of English literacy (English as a Second Language) services already comprise approximately half of the basic adult education program. This program combines English as a Second Language services with civics instruction for individuals on a path to citizenship.

9. The Coalition proposes Career and College Pathways to the purposes of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act.

Many states have developed dual and concurrent enrollment programs with college and technical programs enabling adult learners to progress quickly toward certifications. The Coalition has added Career and College Pathways to the purposes of the Act and has added a definition of those activities. This definition acknowledges and encourages the expansion of those collaborative efforts between the adult education program and the local provider of occupational training and postsecondary education services. It is easier to teach reading, math, and English in the context of a trade in which an adult is interested. Helping adults gain certification in high demand jobs as quickly as possible benefits the individual and the community.

10. The Coalition proposes to create a new Assistant Secretary for Adult Education and Family Literacy position within the Department of Education.

Adult education services are critical to the success of other federal initiatives: job training, public health, welfare, aging, education, and fighting crime to name a few. As a result, partnerships between adult education and each of these agencies can provide more effective services for the adult clients and more productive performance for the agencies. The major stumbling block for collaboration at the local service level has been reported to be the inconsistency of rules and policy at the federal level. In order to facilitate interaction and collaboration between those agencies, a federal manager of rank and singular responsibility is required. To that end, **Adult Education and Family Literacy should be administered by an Assistant Secretary for Adult Education and Literacy.**

Mr. Chairman, adult education serves the needs of diverse citizens throughout the United States. In our struggling economy, it is vitally important that each and every American have an opportunity to grow to their full potential. We need a skilled workforce to keep our nation

strong. We need educated parents to ensure tomorrow's workforce is able to meet the increasing demands of a highly technological workforce. Adult education programs provide an opportunity for our nation to reach the goal of having an educated workforce. We believe this reauthorization provides an opportunity to improve an already effective system.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for providing the opportunity for the National Coalition for Literacy to share our views with you and Members of the Subcommittee.