

A Stronger Workforce for America Act (H.R. 6655): In Brief

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A Stronger Workforce for America Act (H.R. 6655) was ordered reported by the House Committee on Education and Workforce on December 12, 2023.¹ If enacted, the bill would amend and reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA; P.L. 113-128). This report provides a high-level overview of this bill as ordered reported.²

Overview of WIOA and Current Status

WIOA was enacted in 2014 and replaced the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 as the primary federal workforce development statute.³ Workforce development programs support interventions to improve participants' prospects in the labor market, including job training, career services, and other supports. WIOA has six core programs that provide formula grants to state agencies. Three of the core formula grant programs are authorized in Title I and one core program is associated with each of Titles II, III, and IV.⁴ States coordinate their core WIOA funding streams through a unified planning process and coordinated performance accountability system.⁵

Title I of WIOA authorizes three formula grants to states that support training and career services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. State and local workforce development boards develop strategies to facilitate workforce services to meet local needs through a network of One-Stop Career Centers (also known as American Job Centers).⁶ Title I of WIOA also authorizes the Job Corps program and several competitive grants.⁷

Title II of WIOA amended and reauthorized the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), which primarily authorizes formula grants to states for educational services for out-of-school adults, including basic education and English language training.⁸ Title III of WIOA amended the Wagner-Peyser Act, which authorizes Employment Service state grants. Title IV of WIOA amended the Rehabilitation Act, including reauthorizing vocational rehabilitation state grants.⁹

Programs authorized under Titles I and III of WIOA are administered by the Department of Labor (DOL). Programs authorized under Titles II and IV of WIOA are administered by the Department of Education (ED).

WIOA authorized appropriations for each of FY2015 through FY2020. Since FY2021, programs authorized by WIOA have continued to be funded through the annual appropriations process.

¹ More information on the markup is available on the committee website at <https://edworkforce.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=409855>.

² This report is based on the text of the Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute (ANS) to H.R. 6655 that was ordered reported without amendment in the markup. The full text of the ANS is at https://republicans-edlabor.house.gov/UploadedFiles/HR_6655_ANS.pdf and was accessed shortly after the December 12 markup.

³ For more information on WIOA and the programs it authorizes, see CRS Report R44252, *The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the One-Stop Delivery System*.

⁴ Title III of WIOA amends the Wagner-Peyser Act. The core program authorized by the Wagner-Peyser Act (Employment Service state grants) has a permanent authorization and is therefore not technically authorized by WIOA.

⁵ State plans under current law are accessible at <https://wioaplans.ed.gov/>.

⁶ DOL published a fact sheet on state and local workforce boards at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/wioa/pdfs/Boards%20Fact%20Sheet%20FINAL%20March%2023.pdf>.

⁷ For more information on the Job Corps program, see CRS Report R47208, *Job Corps: A Primer*.

⁸ For more information on AEFLA and associated provisions in WIOA, see CRS Report R43789, *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act: Major Statutory Provisions*.

⁹ For more information on these grants, see CRS Report R43855, *Rehabilitation Act: Vocational Rehabilitation State Grants*.

Appropriations for WIOA programs were most recently enacted through March 8, 2024, by a continuing resolution.¹⁰

Major Elements of H.R. 6655

Authorizations of Appropriations

H.R. 6655 would authorize appropriations for programs currently authorized under Title I, Title II, and Title III of WIOA for FY2025 through FY2030. In most cases, annual authorization levels in H.R. 6655 for existing programs would be a fixed annual amount that is slightly above the FY2023 appropriation level.¹¹ Unlike WIOA, H.R. 6655 would neither amend nor reauthorize programs under the Rehabilitation Act.

Amendments to Title I Formula Grant Programs

The bill would retain the general structure and administration of the formula grant programs under Title I. It would change some policies related to administrative procedures and how funds are used at the state and local levels. Major changes would include the following:

- *Potential redesignation of local areas.* H.R. 6655 would direct states to review the designations of local areas in the state and, based on specified considerations, propose redesignations of local areas. A redesignation of local areas would need to be approved by the majority of the local boards in the state.
- *Performance accountability system.* H.R. 6655 would modify the performance negotiation process between DOL and state agencies and clarify performance levels at which a state or local area could be subject to sanctions.¹² H.R. 6655 would replace a subset of the existing performance indicators with new indicators.
- *Eligible Training Providers (ETPs).*¹³ H.R. 6655 would modify procedures for states to identify ETPs that qualify for WIOA funds. WIOA participants who are approved for an individual training account typically select among ETPs. H.R. 6655 would create a designation for ETPs with demonstrated labor market outcomes and designate training programs that are sponsored by local employers or industry partnerships.
- *Training Requirement for Adult and Dislocated Worker Activities.* H.R. 6655 would establish a requirement that at least 50% of the funding allocated to local areas under the Adult Activities and Dislocated Worker Activities programs support eligible training activities. Current law does not specify the

¹⁰ The Further Additional Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-35).

¹¹ A cost estimate for H.R. 6655 from the Congressional Budget Office is available at <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/59882>.

¹² For more information on the negotiations process under current law, see DOL Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 11-19, Change 1, issued May 10, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/tegl-11-19-change-1>.

¹³ For more information on how states designate ETPs under current law, see DOL Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 08-19, issued January 2, 2020, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/training-and-employment-guidance-letter-no-08-19>.

portion of funding for each program that must support training versus other workforce development activities such as career services.

- *Youth Activities Program.* H.R. 6655 would allow grantees to serve more in-school youth as a share of total participants and would increase the percentage of program funds to be used for work experience.
- *Demonstration authority.* H.R. 6655 would establish a new demonstration authority allowing a limited number of eligible states (or approved local areas within a state) to apply to consolidate funding for the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs “to pursue innovative reforms to achieve better outcomes.”¹⁴ The demonstration authority would require such states or local areas to maintain participation and performance levels that exceed either pre-demonstration levels or levels negotiated between the demonstration area and DOL.

Training for Dislocated Workers¹⁵

H.R. 6655 would repurpose existing funding that DOL receives from immigration visa fees for competitive grants to support a new formula grant to states. Funds from the new grant would be used to support training activities for eligible dislocated workers. If a state exhausts the new dedicated formula funds, other WIOA funding streams would be used to support training for eligible dislocated workers.

Codification of the Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) and Strengthening Community Colleges (SCC) Programs

H.R. 6655 would establish permanent authorities in Title I for competitive grant programs that support employment and training services for formerly incarcerated and other justice-involved individuals (REO) and support eligible institutions of higher education and industry partnerships to establish, improve, or expand workforce development programs (SCC). These programs in H.R. 6655 would be similar to REO and SCC grants that have been funded in recent appropriations acts but for which there are no permanent authorizations.¹⁶

Modifications to the Job Corps Program

H.R. 6655 would establish that all Job Corps centers be referred to as campuses and all participants be drug tested within 48 hours of arrival to campus. H.R. 6655 would modify the performance accountability system for the Job Corps program and authorize DOL to take increasingly punitive actions for campuses that continually fail to meet expected levels of performance or are among the lowest-performing campuses. If a campus fails to meet specified

¹⁴ Eligibility for a statewide demonstration project would be limited to states that, in addition to other criteria, are either (1) designated as a single state local area under WIOA or (2) a state with a labor force participation rate that is less than 60% for the most recent program year and a population of less than 6 million. See Section 190(c)(3) of WIOA as would be amended by H.R. 6655.

¹⁵ These provisions are established in Section 302 of H.R. 6655 and would amend the American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act of 1998, as amended. The training would be administered through the same state systems that administer WIOA Title I formula funds.

¹⁶ DOL has published a fact sheet on REO grants, including prior initiatives and current initiatives, at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/reentry/pdf/REO-Fact-Sheet-5.15.23.pdf>. Information on prior SCC grants is available from DOL at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/skills-training-grants/scc>.

levels of performance or is ranked among the lowest 10% of campuses for two consecutive years, DOL could take substantial action, which could include changing the management. If a campus continues to rank among the lowest 10% or fails to meet specified performance levels for two additional consecutive years, DOL must relocate the campus, close the campus, or award the funding directly to the state.

Reauthorization of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA)

Similar to Title II of WIOA, H.R. 6655 would amend and reauthorize AEFLA. The basic structure of the law and the core formula grant program would be retained.

Amendments to Wagner-Peyser Act

Similar to Title III of WIOA, H.R. 6655 would amend the Wagner-Peyser Act. The bill would make the Employment Services state grants under the Wagner-Peyser Act the primary means of supporting basic career services in the One-Stop system.¹⁷ The bill would amend and extend the authorization for Workforce Information Grants.¹⁸

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¹⁷ This designation would also be in Title I of WIOA, see Section 134 of WIOA as would be amended by H.R. 6655.

¹⁸ Workforce Information Grants support state labor market information units and other activities. For more information on these grants, see the applicable section beginning on page SUIESO-95 of the FY2024 DOL Budget Justification at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2024/CBJ-2024-V1-07.pdf>.