

Bipartisan Bill Announced to Improve American Adult Education and Workforce Development Systems

A group of eight Senate and House leaders have been working together for months to craft the "bi-cameral, bipartisan" Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) that was introduced as a total replacement for WIA in late May. The legislation, which is now working its way through both chambers, could be voted on within the next few weeks.

WIOA strongly resembles the Senate version of 2013 (S.1356) while incorporating a number of key elements of the approved House version (H.R.803). This includes the elimination of 15 federal programs, a number of which were defunded years ago, such as the National Institute for Literacy.

The bill has generally received praise from adult education leaders and national literacy organizations such as ProLiteracy, the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, and the National Coalition for Literacy.

Key elements of the Title II section of the bill, which address adult education and literacy, include:

- An emphasis on postsecondary transitions and career pathway programs for adult learners;
- Improved alignment and coordination of adult education and literacy programs which provide workforce development through the requirement of a state unified plan and a common set of performance metrics;
- Expanded focus on digital literacy and the use of technology in adult education;
- A required state professional development system;
- A codification of the English language and civics education (EL/Civics) grant program;
- Incremental funding increases through 2020.

A number of adult literacy organizations, including ProLiteracy, have voiced concerns that a divide seems to exist in the legislation between acknowledging the need to serve low-level learners and the overall focus on career readiness and postsecondary education. Concerns have been raised that certain provisions of the bill may motivate program planners to turn away from providing services to the lowest skilled adults, who take longer to move on to college and job readiness, or to adults who pursue adult education for reasons other than readiness for jobs and college. Some education leaders have also questioned whether adequate funding will be made available to accomplish all that the legislation includes. This is especially true given that current federal funding only reaches approximately 3% of those who need services.

[Click here](#) to read the bill and for more information.