

Native American Employment and Training Council

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March 11, 2013

John Kline, Chair
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Virginia Foxx
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
1230 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Representative Foxx:

On behalf of the Native American Employment and Training Council and the Indian and Native American grantee community, I am writing in regard to the Supporting Knowledge and Investing in Lifelong Skills Act (H.R. 803), also referred to as the SKILLS Act. We believe that the proposed elimination of a separate funding stream for all employment and training for Indian and Native American grantees receiving funding under the Workforce Investment Act would be an atrocity for our communities.

The Native American programs authorized under Section 166 (and in job training legislation for the past four decades) have a unique status and purpose which includes a community focus, unlike that of all other programs under the Act. The service population consists of Native Americans – American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians – with a special relationship to the United States Government and these programs are to be administered in a manner consistent with basic federal Indian policy, set by the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (Public Law 93-638).

The special status of the Indian and Native American programs and support provided for them are central to the relationship between Native American people and their institutions and the rest of the federally-funded workforce system. Native American people suffer from the most severe unemployment and poverty rates of any group in the country. The overall workforce system's ability to serve the Native American segment of the population is totally dependent on a strong Native American service delivery system, assisted with job training funds.

Indian and Native American employment and training programs have a long history of successes providing critical services to clients needing support as they strive for self-sufficiency by gaining the training and work experience they so desperately need. The programs also have played an important part in helping to improve the circumstances and situations of Indian and Native American communities, but our work is far from done.

These programs date back to the early days of manpower programs. They were authorized with the understanding that American Indian Tribes are sovereign nations that have a unique trust relationship with the United States government. The Indian and Native American programs funded

through the employment and training system were funded to provide support and services to individuals who otherwise would not access the mainstream employment and training programs, whether due to remoteness or cultural considerations.

Given the realities facing our nation, we recognize that some streamlining of federal workforce programs needs to occur. However, we respectfully request that you consider including language to amend and strengthen H.R. 803 on behalf of the Native American community. In this regard:

- * Native American programs must remain separate and distinct, with their own purposes and governing policies retained from Section 166 of WIA, including the provisions to consolidate programs through Public Law 102-477 initiatives.
- * Flexibility of the current Section 166 program must be continued and strengthened, governed by requirements which are appropriate for Native American programs and not ones designed for the state-administered programs.
- * Funding must be at no less than the 1% proposed in H.R. 803, and funding for Native American youth must be included.
- * The Native American Employment and Training Council must be retained within the U.S. Department of Labor structure, preferably at the Secretary's level.
- * Workforce investment system funding needs to be administered at the national level and cannot be distributed to states to be administered by governors. Indian and Native American programs would not be guaranteed funding to provide crucial services needed by clients to maintain their connection with the workforce.
- * Administer the programs in a manner consistent with basic federal Indian policy.

It is imperative that strong Native American workforce programs, uniquely adapted to the status and circumstances of Native American people and communities, continue in their work to improve the lives of their clients and communities. Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and proposed amendment language.

Sincerely,



Lorenda T. Sanchez, Chair
Native American Employment and Training Council

cc: Committee on Education and the Workforce
Native American Employment and Training Council Members