May 8, 2020

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

Thank you for your leadership and efforts to pass the previous COVID-19 relief packages. As you work on the next set of legislation, we ask that you prioritize credential transparency, which will better equip the millions of Americans who have to reenter the labor market when the economy opens up. Specifically, we urge you to include $90 million to provide guidance and financial support for States and local areas to make information on recognized postsecondary credentials and their competencies publicly available, searchable, and comparable as linked open data, as called for in Education and Labor Committee Chairman Bobby Scott's (D-VA) recently introduced Relaunching America's Workforce Act. States will use these resources to ensure their data systems can track the information necessary to accomplish this through the purchase of hardware and software and training for key personnel.

Furthermore, as you know, the Relaunching America's Workforce Act includes $2 billion to restart the Trade Adjustment Assistance for Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program to fund community college/industry parternships. It requires the Secretary of Labor to "provide guidance and financial support to States and local areas on how to make information on recognized postsecondary credentials and related competencies being awarded with funds under this title publicly available, searchable and comparable as linked open data." We are supportive of this language and ask that it be included in any funding package that provides appropriations for this restarted community college program.
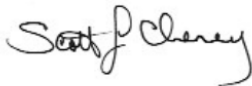
There are over 730,000 credentials currently offered in the United States, with insufficient information available for consumers to make informed comparisons and decisions about value, quality, pathways and outcomes. The number and related complexity of the credential marketplace will only grow in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between the financial hit to families and institutions, the need to quickly reskill to find new work, and the accelerated changes in skills needed in the workplace, traditional approaches to preparing for and succeeding on the job will decline, while new programs, delivery methods, and credentials will expand. Add to that the many different technology tools and online learning options that could connect people with jobs, and there is both opportunity and confusion.

To mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the already growing credential marketplace, consumers need more specific information. Improving the transparency around credentials is an urgent first step to support informed decision-making throughout the labor market. To do so, States need funding and guidance to make credentials and their competencies publicly available, searchable and comparable as linked open data. Likewise, any funding for a new community college program should include similar language to ensure such an initiative also applies this standard.

When the economy begins to open following the pandemic, millions of Americans will need to reskill in order to find employment in the new, vastly different labor market. It is inefficient and ineffective to expect these job seekers to be able to make informed decisions without accessible credential information. $90 million in financial support to States to make credential information available and comparable and added resources for community colleges and industry partnerships will play a significant role in equipping both employers and job seekers to successfully reenter the economy.

Thank you for considering this request. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Scott Cheney
Executive Director
Credential Engine

Organizations & Individuals in Support

Advance CTE
American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)
Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation
Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW)
Data Quality Campaign (DQC)
Goodwill Industries International
Harry J. Holzer, Georgetown University
Jobs For the Future (JFF)
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL)
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)
National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE)
National Skills Coalition (NSC)
Results for America
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)