

Summary of Testimony to the Committee on Appropriations
Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Subcommittee

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The Adult Education and Family Literacy program, funded as Title II of the Workforce Investment Act, enables the states to educate almost three million undereducated and limited English proficient adults each year. The members of the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education are the individuals responsible for overseeing the adult education program in each of the 50 fifty states, territories, and outlying areas. The adult education program addresses a wide array of public policy priorities and it does so with remarkable efficiency and effectiveness. My remarks focus on the following four points:

1. OUR NATION'S INVESTMENT IN ADULT EDUCATION

The current appropriation for adult education grants to states is \$569 million. **This federal investment leverages an additional \$1.6 billion in matching funds from the states** although most of that matching share (83%) is attributable to just 10 states. Hence, more than almost any other education program, federal funding drives the adult education program in the majority of states.

What does this federal investment buy?

- Intergenerational Literacy
- Math
- **High School Diploma**
- English Language
- Citizenship
- **Preventive Health**
- **A First Job & Job Advancement**
- **Self Sufficiency**
- **Public Safety / Reduced Recidivism**
- **Transitions to Training & Higher Education**
- **Economic Development**
- **Increased Competitiveness**

These are not only benefits to the individuals who enroll in adult education, they are public policy priorities that affect all sectors of our communities and our economy.

2. THE DEMONSTRATED EFFECTIVENESS OF ADULT EDUCATION

There are serious misperceptions about the performance of adult education programs. While all education and training services are being held to higher standards of performance accountability, NO program has done more in this regard than adult education AND the results are quite remarkable. Adult educators working in programs supported with federal and state funding are deeply committed to services that are research based, that are accountable for results, and that use data to continuously improve services. This data has been faithfully transmitted to the U.S. Department of Education that, in turn, has negotiated ever more rigorous levels of performance

for each state over the past five years. So, how did the adult education program end up with a rating of “results not demonstrated” from OMB’s “PART” assessment?

The answer lies in the lack of coordination between two federal agencies and NOT in any deficiencies in performance by adult education programs! In fact, the PART assessment acknowledges it has the performance data documented by the adult education program but then does not use it, assigning instead a score of “0” for “Results,” NOT because of any issues related to data quality or rigor but because the cognizant federal agency (Education) used *percents* instead of the *numeric targets* used by OMB for PART! The national and the state adult education programs can provide abundant, rigorous performance data and are prepared to do so at your request. This program delivers.

3. THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISINVESTMENT

The President’s budget proposes a 66% cut in funding for the adult education program and for eliminating the Even Start for Family Literacy program. The administration has concluded that it can no longer support these programs because the “results are not demonstrated.” We applaud these results driven process, however, this “conclusion” about the adult education program is based on incomplete data and faulty assumptions that are internal to the administration and not attributable to the thousands of dedicated and effective adult education programs and teachers.

Reducing the adult education appropriation by \$369 million will throw half a million under-educated and limited English proficient adults out of their classes exacerbating the long waiting lists for services in many states. Despite the level funding of the “English Literacy / Civics” part of the appropriation, hundreds of thousands of Latino and other immigrant adults striving to learn English would be forced out of their adult education classes due to cuts in the basic state grant. Neither increased Pell Grants nor increasingly effective public schools will significantly diminish the need and demand for adult education services.

Disinvesting in adult education doesn’t make sense for millions of undereducated and limited English proficient American adults, it doesn’t make sense for competitiveness and economic prosperity, and it doesn’t make sense for the quality of life of our communities.

4. KEEPING THE AMERICAN DREAM ALIVE

“Return On Investment” (ROI) studies for adult education have shown a 3:1 return of benefits for each public dollar expended. These studies cannot capture what will happen if millions of Americans lose hope of ever being able to pursue the American Dream. We cannot retreat from our investment in adult education for one very simple and powerful reason: it is one of the few programs that can “expand the pie” and bring a better life within reach for all of us. At current funding levels, adult education can only enroll three million of the 90 million adults who lack an adequate foundation of basic academic and English language skills. The “unmet need” is staggering – for individuals, communities and businesses in your district, your state, and across the nation. We call upon Congress to INCREASE its investment in adult education and keep the American Dream alive for all of us.