



June 12, 2024

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chair
Senate HELP Committee
430 Dirksen SOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee
455 Dirksen SOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

On behalf of the National Retail Federation (NRF), I write to thank you for calling today's hearing entitled, "The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Supporting Efforts to Meet the Needs of Youth, Workers, and Employers." Since the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014, the workforce and the overall economy have seen dramatic structural changes, and NRF is eager to work with the Committee to modernize the law. As the Committee continues to discuss meaningful ways to improve WIOA, NRF urges you to consider revisions that increase opportunities for job seekers at all skill levels.

The National Retail Federation passionately advocates for the people, brands, policies and ideas that help retail succeed. From its headquarters in Washington, D.C., NRF empowers the industry that powers the economy. Retail is the nation's largest private-sector employer, contributing \$5.3 trillion to annual GDP and supporting more than one in four U.S. jobs — 55 million working Americans. For over a century, NRF has been a voice for every retailer and every retail job, educating, inspiring and communicating the powerful impact retail has on local communities and global economies.

NRF is pleased that Members of Congress are working to find innovative methods of assisting employers in filling job openings with qualified workers. WIOA reforms must ensure that workforce centers provide training programs that teach people the skills needed to thrive and advance their careers.

Retailers are increasingly identifying entry-level associates with strong performance characteristics and upskilling them for more advanced roles. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data, the average front-line worker has seen their wages increase by 15.7% over the past three years to \$20.90 per hour. Store managers now make an average of \$101,275. A 2023 study by the research firm Lotus Blue found that the average retail worker makes a lateral or upward career move every 14.5 months gaining a 15% pay increase.

Accordingly, it is critical that our workforce system ensures workers have the skills to shine in their entry-level roles. The Committee should consider WIOA reforms that foster opportunities for job seekers to obtain industry recognized credentials that teach basic,

foundational skills. Not every person wants or is ready for a full-time, salaried role, and our workforce system should have the flexibility to accommodate jobseekers looking for their first job.

Congress should also consider revisions to WIOA to provide adequate funding for job seekers to pursue “micro credentials.” Such credentials are affordable and earned over days, not years. Micro credentials allow job seekers to demonstrate they possess specific skills that are required for securing a job or a promotion. Examples include credentials conveying competence in customer service, sales, and conflict de-escalation.

Similarly, the Committee should consider language embracing asynchronous educational programs that allow learners to access training programs anywhere, at any time. Such programs do not require or depend on classroom settings and may be helpful to those Americans who struggle to access training centers due to lack of access, time, transportation options or childcare responsibilities.

NRF respectfully requests that this letter be made a part of the official hearing record. We look forward to working with the Committee as you update and modernize WIOA. Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David French".

David French
Senior Vice President
Government Relations