

SECRETARY OF LABOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20210

DEC 21 2018

Dear Workforce Information Advisory Council Members:

Thank you for submitting your “Recommendations to Improve the Nation’s Workforce and Labor Market Information System” report. I also thank all past and present committee members for their participation and leadership in coordinating and guiding the Workforce Information Advisory Council’s (WIAC) work.

The WIAC’s informational report and other input will be considered in the Department’s development of a two-year plan to improve the workforce and labor market information system. The Department of Labor provides the following response to the recommendations in your informational report.

Recommendation 1. Enhance Unemployment Insurance (UI) Wage Records

WIAC recommends the Department pursue the inclusion of additional data elements to UI wage records, including occupational title, hours worked, and work site. The Department supports improving its data resources generally but is also mindful of the costs versus benefits of doing so and the limits of its statutory authority. The Department will consult with businesses and states in the coming months to better understand the benefits and any possible concerns regarding enhancing UI wage records and looks forward to continuing to work with WIAC on this important issue.

Recommendation 2. Expand Information on Occupations, Skills and Credentials

WIAC recommends the Department increase investments in information on the workforce skill requirements of current and emerging occupations, including credential attainment and outcomes, and transferability of skills among industries and occupations. As noted above, the Department generally supports increasing its ability to measure and analyze programs but is also mindful of costs versus benefits of doing so and the limits of its statutory authority. Accordingly, the Department will continue and improve upon current efforts to study credential issues and obtain additional information regarding workforce skill requirements, including through review of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program performance data. The Department will also continue to examine options to develop and implement new and more efficient ways to obtain credentials and skills information to further this goal.

Recommendation 3. Develop and Disseminate a K-12 Career Awareness Educational Framework

WIAC recommends the Department develop, disseminate, and regularly update a K-12 career awareness educational framework to address the career awareness gap and increase public understanding of career pathways and options starting at an early age. The Department supports the thoughtful goals of WIAC in making this recommendation; however, this recommendation is not within the scope of DOL’s authority. The development or recommendation of national

curriculum to all the states is inconsistent with a number of statutory requirements and policy objectives, including those of 29 U.S.C. 3164, 20 U.S.C. 3403, 20 U.S.C. 1232a, 20 U.S.C. 7906a and 7907, and Executive Order 13791. The Department will, however, continue its efforts to raise awareness of career information resources to address the career information gap among young people and workers in the U.S. labor force and make that information available to states as well as the public generally. The Department's efforts to promote apprenticeship and other work-based learning approaches also provide opportunities to help young people develop and understand the skills necessary for different careers and learn about the many pathways to a good, family-sustaining career.

Recommendation 4. Develop Information on the Changing Nature of Work

WIAC recommends the Department pursue the regular collection and development of information that provides an understanding of the scope and volume of alternative work arrangements or other causes for the reduction in traditional workforce participation. The Department agrees on the importance of this effort and is reviewing the results from the Contingent Worker Survey to determine what further information is needed on the changing nature of work. ETA and BLS will continue to support, leverage, and participate as appropriate in public-private partnerships to promote efforts by industry to more clearly signal their skill and hiring needs. The Department is also working diligently to expand workforce opportunities and develop new mechanisms to make retirement and health care benefits available more broadly to working Americans and their families regardless of the nature of their work.

Recommendation 5. Increase Support for State and Local Information in the Workforce and Labor Market Information (WLMI) System

WIAC recommends the Department include in the Department of Labor budget for FY 2020 a request for annual funding to states from BLS for the Federal-State Cooperative Statistics System and from ETA for Workforce Information Grants to States at twice the current funding level to strengthen the provision of state and local information in the nationwide WLMI System. The Department supports improving information quality and availability for states, and allocates a significant amount of funds to these efforts every year. For example, ETA currently allocates \$32 million for workforce information grants to states and in FY 2018, BLS allocated \$70.8 million to states through the federal-state cooperative programs. The Department will study ways to improve WLMI support without requesting additional funds and will also weigh WIAC's recommendation for additional funding against other priorities in the formulation of future budgets.

Recommendation 6. Overcome Barriers to Data Sharing

WIAC recommends the Department enable greater use of WLMI for evidence-based workforce investment decision-making by supporting the implementation of relevant recommendations of the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking. The Department supports evidence-based decision-making and has significant ongoing work in this area and will monitor future Congressional action around evidence-based policymaking, leverage existing investments in data-sharing, and provide technical assistance as requested on legislative proposals emerging from the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking report.

Recommendation 7. Improve Consistency and Availability of Program Evaluation Data

WIAC recommends the Department improve consistency and availability of workforce program assessment and evaluation data by establishing the state WLMI unit or other unit determined by the state as the designated state entity for the provision of WIOA workforce program participant outcomes, performance assessments, and evaluations. Though the Department supports consistency and availability for program data, the Department believes that requiring the proposed organizational structure for all states would extend beyond the scope of our federal role in the workforce system, and would decrease the flexibility that state and local leaders have to make decisions appropriate for their individual state. The proposed requirement is not contemplated by either WIOA or Wagner-Peyser and legislation would be most effective to implement this recommendation. Instead, the Department will continue its efforts to work with states on setting appropriate minimum standards to improve data integration.

Recommendation 8. Create a 21st Century WLMI System Using Advanced Technologies

WIAC recommends the Department create a twenty-first century WLMIS based on a distributed knowledge management system that uses an open architecture/open data approach and artificial intelligence and related advanced technologies. ETA and BLS are exploring ways to enhance and modernize the WLMI technology infrastructure and potential opportunities for public-private partnerships to continue to innovate in this area. DOL will include considering open architecture and AI in such enhancements.

Recommendation 9. Initiate Collaboration Among WLMI System Agencies

WIAC recommends the Department initiate collaboration among WLMIS agencies by directing ETA and BLS to convene a gathering of representatives from federal and state programs that contribute information essential to a well-functioning workforce and labor market information system. The Department supports the WIAC's goal of improved collaboration and will continue to improve longstanding efforts to increase collaboration among WLMI stakeholders.

The Department appreciates the input from the WIAC and the actions we will undertake based upon your recommendations will help improve the workforce and labor market information systems at the local, state, and national levels. Should you have any questions, please contact Steve Rietzke, the WIAC's Designated Federal Officer and Division Chief for ETA's Division of National Programs, Tools, and Technical Assistance at (202) 693-3912 or rietzke.steven@dol.gov or Amanda Ahlstrand, Administrator of the Office of Workforce Investment at (202) 693-3980 or ahlstrand.amanda@dol.gov.

Sincerely,



R. ALEXANDER ACOSTA
Secretary of Labor