

**Written Testimony of James D. Ogsbury, Executive Director
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**Submitted to the United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
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Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations

Chair Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, and Members of the Subcommittee, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony on the appropriations and activities of the federal agencies under the Subcommittee's jurisdiction, including the Departments of Labor (DOL), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education (ED). WGA is an independent organization representing the Governors of the 22 westernmost states and territories. The Association is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information sharing and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had widespread effects on the labor market and the health care system in the United States. As the recovery continues, it is critical to align policies, performance metrics, regulations and reporting requirements across federal workforce, human services, housing and education agencies in order to achieve the best outcomes for program participants.

DOL funding for workforce development through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) supports economic growth and job creation in the states. Western Governors request that the 15 percent reserve for statewide activities be maintained in appropriations under WIOA. This funding allows Governors to be flexible and innovative in addressing state needs. More flexibility under the current WIOA streams is needed to better anticipate coming labor market disruptions and workers who are not traditionally eligible for assistance or as at-risk incumbent workers prepare for displacement. That flexibility should include allowing Governors to fund outreach and marketing of services in an effort to reach more people. Short term and competitive funding for innovative programs is inefficient and creates unintended obstacles for small states with limited grant writing resources.

Western Governors support the expansion of registered apprenticeship programs and encourage Congress to support and incentivize state, local, and industry-led partnerships to create and scale apprenticeship programs through increased appropriations. New federal investments in apprenticeships should be provided through line-item formula funding and aligned with existing efforts to foster a coherent system with minimal duplication at the federal, state and local levels.

Western Governors support efforts to increase student access to short-term education and skills training, including through expanding the Pell Grant program to include high-quality short-

term training programs leading to industry-recognized credentials. Western Governors support funding high-quality career and technical education (CTE) programs through the Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V). Adequate funding of Perkins State Grants is essential to ensure that CTE programs align with statewide visions for education and workforce development. Governors and states are in the best position to determine how to use federal CTE funding to meet the needs of their economies.

Better linkages between K-12, higher education and the workforce system are needed. Western Governors call for a carveout of Perkins funding directed to the workforce system to support stronger linkages to K-12 and higher education. Further, to address the crisis in youth employment, Western Governors urge an expanded WIOA funding stream for youth, targeted toward youth who are disconnected from school and work, as well as the establishment of a Youth Employment Taskforce to make further recommendations on effective workforce strategies to address the crisis in youth employment. Finally, to ensure that workforce development programs are inclusive of people with disabilities, Congress should provide additional funding and training for states to conduct outreach and education on equal opportunity and nondiscrimination and to link workforce programs with K-12 special education services.

Improvements in state data infrastructure are needed to better support state education and workforce development, including responding to changing labor market demand, improving the effectiveness of policies and programs, and improving the delivery of services. The Subcommittee should provide adequate funding to support state Labor Market Information shops and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. States should receive a greater share of funds under the state-federal cooperative statistics programs. Western Governors also call for significantly greater ongoing funding through the Workforce Information Grants to States to enhance state capacity evidence-based decision making and the production of locally relevant labor market intelligence. Finally, Western Governors recommend that Congress invest long-term in multi-state data collaboratives and in more voluntary state participation in collaboratives to enable a truly national data infrastructure to emerge.

Building a sufficient cybersecurity workforce is especially important to Western Governors. A skilled cyber workforce is imperative to the protection of critical infrastructure, which includes a vast array of potential targets. These include: the nation's electric grid; energy resource supply and delivery chains; finance, communications, and election systems; and a panoply of public, private, military and industrial systems. Western Governors request sufficient appropriations for high-quality cybersecurity education and workforce development programs to grow and sustain the cybersecurity workforce, including those that target underrepresented populations, those that include rotational components to retain personnel, and work-based learning opportunities such as apprenticeships. The Governors support increased funding for the CyberCorps: Scholarship for Service program and educational initiatives, including the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Initiative for Cybersecurity Education and the National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense. Civilian cybersecurity reserves can also help augment cybersecurity workforce capacity.

Despite efforts by Western Governors to address the shortage of qualified health care workers in our states, significant challenges remain. Governors urge the federal government to

examine and implement programs to ensure states have an adequate health care workforce – including positions in primary care, behavioral and oral health as well as other in-demand specialties – prepared to serve diverse populations in urban, suburban and rural communities. Understanding that significant disparities remain in access and treatment for many populations, Governors support efforts to increase the diversity and representation in the health care workforce to improve health outcomes for all. Western Governors recognize efforts to support the health care workforce in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA, Pub. L. 117-2) and request a continued focus on this important topic. They also encourage the Subcommittee to fund new types of personnel, such as community health workers or promotores, in order to further extend the health care team and ensure that patients are connected to resources, and innovation within the behavioral health care workforce to address gaps in the continuum of care professionals.

Americans are facing an alarming increase in adverse mental health conditions, substance misuse, and suicidal ideation, trends that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Western Governors appreciate the substantial investment in mental and behavioral health services in ARPA and support continued efforts to improve the quality and quantity of these services. They are essential to reducing suicide rates and treating a range of behavioral health conditions, including substance use disorder. The top ten states with the highest suicide rates are in the West. Western states are also among those with the highest overall rates of substance use disorder, especially for youth between the ages of 12 to 17. Western Governors recognize and support efforts at the federal, state and local levels to promote the integration of physical and behavioral health services. The Governors encourage Congress and the Administration to support states' integration efforts and encourage health care providers to better incorporate behavioral and physical medicine into their practice of care. The expansion of early intervention, diversion, and community reentry programs aid in such efforts.

COVID-19 has also laid bare the importance of investing in our nation's public health system. Congress should examine the lessons learned from COVID-19 in collaboration with states, and based on these findings, they request that the Subcommittee ensure that states and the nation have the capability and necessary public health infrastructure investment to effectively confront future public health challenges. The expansion and support of international health surveillance and public health threat detection mechanisms is of critical importance to these efforts as well.

In addition, Western Governors are committed to identifying risks facing high utilizers of health care services and addressing social determinants of health. They encourage the continued support of services and programs, especially those that empower states and local governments to solve persistent economic and social conditions that often hinder health outcomes.

Western Governors recognize that it is an enormous challenge to judiciously balance competing funding needs throughout the federal government, and appreciate the difficulty of the decisions this Subcommittee must make. The foregoing recommendations are offered in a spirit of cooperation and respect. WGA is prepared to assist you as the Subcommittee discharges its critical and challenging responsibilities.