

**Written Testimony of Jack Waldorf, Executive Director  
Western Governors' Association**

**Submitted to the United States Senate  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
March 27, 2023**

**Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations**

Chair Baldwin, Ranking Member Capito, 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.

DOL funding for workforce development through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) supports economic growth and job creation in the states. More flexibility under current WIOA funding streams is needed to better anticipate coming labor market disruptions. Additional flexibility would also help workers who are not traditionally eligible for assistance and at-risk incumbent workers as they prepare for displacement. Flexibility should include allowing Governors to fund outreach and the marketing of services to reach more people in need. Short term and competitive funding for innovative programs is inefficient and creates unintended obstacles for small states with limited grant writing resources. Western Governors appreciate the Subcommittee's concern about shortages of water and wastewater system operators and recommendation to DOL to make funding available to this sector through WIOA in FY2023 and encourage similar considerations in FY2024.

Western Governors support the expansion of registered apprenticeship programs and encourage Congress to support and incentivize state, territorial, 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, territorial, and local levels.

Western Governors call for full funding for high-quality career and technical education (CTE) programs through the Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins). Adequate funding of Perkins State Grants is essential to ensure that CTE programs align with statewide visions for education and workforce development. Further, 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.

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 task force 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 centers 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.

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 diversity and representation in the health care workforce to improve health outcomes for all. Western Governors 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 record levels of adverse mental health conditions, suicidal ideation, and substance misuse, trends that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Western Governors appreciate the substantial investment in mental and behavioral health services by the Subcommittee in FY2023 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, which disproportionately affect the West. Western Governors recognize and support efforts at the federal, state, territorial and local levels to promote the integration of physical and behavioral health services. The Governors encourage Congress and the Administration to support states' and territories' 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 laid bare the importance of investing in our nation's public health system. Western Governors appreciate the Subcommittee's focus on public health preparedness and response in FY2023 and request further investments in public health infrastructure and health surveillance mechanisms to effectively confront future public health challenges.

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 that empower states, territories and local governments to solve persistent economic and social conditions that often hinder health outcomes.

As we continue to recover from the widespread effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market and the health care system in the United States, 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 program outcomes. Given the numerous federal agency programs, policies, and regulations directly affecting the collective states, agency coordination with states and the integration of state data into federal programs for policymaking is paramount to their success. Western Governors support full and consistent federal funding for agencies to carry out the requirements of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-435) and encourage the Subcommittee to direct federal agencies to improve their internal processes and coordinate with states on federal data policies and procedures, as required in the Act.

Western Governors recognize that it is an enormous challenge to judiciously balance competing funding needs throughout the federal government, appreciate the difficulty of the decisions you must make, and stand ready to work with you on these important matters.