

**Written Testimony of James D. Ogsbury, 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 4, 2020**

Fiscal Year 2021 Appropriations

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, 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.

Western states are aligning education to workforce needs in an effort to create economic opportunities for westerners and support growing economies. DOL and ED programs have a significant effect on how states address challenges related to skills gaps, unemployment and educational attainment. Western Governors understand the importance of working closely with the federal government to ensure that federal and state investments in education and employment training support shared goals.

Career and technical education (CTE) provides students with opportunities to explore careers and participate in programs of study designed around specific professions. CTE programs are funded through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act). States distribute Perkins Act funds to school districts, community or technical colleges, and other local recipients. Western Governors encourage Congress to recognize that Governors and states are in the best position to determine how to use federal CTE funding to meet the needs of their economies. Adequate funding of Perkins State Grants is essential to ensure that CTE programs align with statewide visions for education and workforce development.

Western Governors understand the importance of work-based learning programs to help jobseekers obtain experience and training for in-demand occupations while earning money. Western Governors support the expansion of work-based learning programs, including federally registered apprenticeship programs. These are important tools to address skills gaps in specific sectors in western states. While apprenticeships have been traditionally used in the building trades, western states are leading the way in expanding registered apprenticeship opportunities to new sectors, including health care and information technology. Western Governors 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 align with existing efforts to foster a coherent system with minimal duplication at the federal, state and local levels.

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.

Expanding education and training programs for cybersecurity is especially important to Western Governors. A skilled cyber workforce is imperative to protect 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.

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 of the health care workforce to improve health outcomes for all.

Western Governors also support efforts to improve the quality and quantity of behavioral health services, as these are essential to reducing suicide rates and treating a range of behavioral health conditions, including substance use disorder. The ten states with the highest suicide rates in the nation are all 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 12-17. 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.

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.