

**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 2022 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.

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. Western Governors also encourage DOL and ED to continue coordinating their efforts, where possible, to better align federal workforce development, career and technical education, and higher education programs for the benefit of our shared constituents.

There are many pathways students can take to a successful career, including short-term education and skills training. Western Governors support efforts to increase student access to these programs, including through expanding the Pell Grant program to include high-quality short-term training programs leading to industry-recognized credentials. Western Governors support high-quality career and technical education (CTE) programs to help expose students to their career options and develop skills they will need in the workforce and support funding for these 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.

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.

Western Governors support the expansion of registered apprenticeship programs. 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.

Western Governors recognize the benefits of measuring and reporting outcomes of skills training and higher education programs. Outcomes metrics tied to employment and earnings would provide useful information for students and their families and help maximize the success of these programs in preparing students for in-demand jobs and careers in their regions.

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. 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.

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.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans are facing an increase in adverse mental health conditions, substance misuse, and suicidal ideation. Western Governors 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.

In addition to behavioral health, Western Governors are invested in identifying risks facing high utilizers of health care services and addressing these 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.