



The Honorable Patty Murray
 Chair
 Senate Committee on Health,
 Education, Labor, and Pensions
 428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
 United States Senate
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
 Ranking Member
 Senate Committee on Health,
 Education, Labor, and Pensions
 428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
 United States Senate
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
 Chairman
 House Committee on Education and Labor
 2176 Rayburn House Office Building
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
 Ranking Member
 House Committee on Education and Labor
 2101 Rayburn House Office Building
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515

August 23, 2021

Re: Recommendations for Workforce Development Provisions in Recovery Legislation

Dear Chair Murray and Chairman Scott:

Thank you for the role you have each played in the past 15 months to provide critical resources to communities hit hard by the health, economic, and educational consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like so many parts of the country, the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the vast structural inequalities faced in the San Francisco Bay Area community. Existing inequities have made the current crisis more painful for many of our residents, including those experiencing poverty, our disabled neighbors, as well as our Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian Pacific Islander, and other residents of color, women and families raising children. Recent uprisings throughout our region have highlighted the need for transformative, structural change, and the need to center racial equity at the heart of these conversations throughout our region.

We have come together across the private, public and nonprofit sectors to work in collaboration toward a more equitable recovery in our region, home to over 7.7 million people, and look to your leadership in writing and advancing the workforce development components of federal recovery legislation that supports those efforts. To that end, we provide our recommendations below to support working families' security in an equitable economy by increasing job quality, labor standards, work supports, and workforce skills, and supporting workers who lost their jobs during the pandemic in finding new employment, which is especially critical for women of color who have experienced disproportionately higher unemployment rates.

The Need for Strong Workforce Development Policies

We welcome the workforce development provisions of President Biden's American Jobs Plan, in particular that workforce development programs include wraparound services, income supports, counseling, and case management, paired with high-quality training and effective partnerships between educational institutions, unions, and employers—all of which are also consistent with provisions of the [Relaunching America's Workforce Act](#) (H.R. 602, S. 200). We also welcome the inclusion of significant set-aside funds in the president's plan that target job training for formerly incarcerated individuals and opportunity youth.

As you write the recovery legislation that advances the American Jobs Plan and American Families Plan, we respectfully urge you to also set minimum standards to ensure that workforce development funds are used toward preparing workers for quality jobs.

This will be critically important toward advancing economic equity for those communities that were struggling before the pandemic, and whose economic security has been further eroded. Significant racial and gender disparities exist across many areas and show people of color overrepresented in low-quality or unstable employment:

- Unemployment: 42% of Black Californian workers filed for unemployment insurance during the pandemic (more than one and a half the rate of White workers). Women across the state have faced higher unemployment rates and disproportionately left the labor force to assume childcare responsibilities.
- Low-wage workers: In eight of the nine counties in the region, low-wage workers experienced the largest declines in employment, with employment rates dropping by 20 to 44 percent between January and October 2020. Even before the pandemic, Black and Latinx workers in Oakland and San Francisco were two-and-a-half times more likely to earn poverty wages than their white counterparts, and three times likelier in San Jose.¹

¹ California Future of Work Commission, A new social compact for work and workers, March 2021, 15.

- Automation Vulnerable Jobs: 67% of those working in automation vulnerable jobs are workers of color. Latinx workers represent 32 percent of workers in high automation-risk jobs though making up only 22% of the overall workforce.
- “Gig” Workers: 78% of San Francisco “gig” workers are workers of color, 45% of whom said they do not have the means to cover a \$400 emergency.

Minimum Job Quality Standards

Federal recovery legislation should include minimum standards for quality jobs and allow states to set higher standards, as well as allow states the option to develop and fund job quality task forces to set floors and targets for the use of recovery resources. Minimum standards should be applied at three key points: 1) in setting goals and metrics for workforce development funding and evaluation; 2) creating a minimum floor for job placement and/or employers and service providers who receive funds to provide training, On The Job Training, Work Experience, or similar workforce programs and services; and 3) establishing screening criteria for procurement contracts, purchasing, business grants, loans, and economic development subsidies and incentives, in order to ensure that federal funding is generating quality jobs for trainees to enter. The application of these standards could be adapted for earn-and-learn transitional jobs, such as those provided by employment social enterprises, along with safeguards to ensure such jobs are truly a stepping-stone toward jobs that can support a family’s basic needs.

Minimum federal standards should include:

- Payment of workers at or above local or regional living wage standards as well as payment at or above regional prevailing wage standards where such standards exist for the occupations in question.
- Provision of meaningful health benefits and adequate sick leave.
- Equity in hiring, compensation, assignment, scheduling, and advancement.
- Protection against discrimination, harassment, or retaliation.
- A commitment to investment in employee training, growth, and development.
- Provision of opportunities for career advancement and wage growth.
- Safe and healthy working conditions.
- Consistent compliance with workplace laws and regulations, including proactive efforts to remedy past problems.
- Adoption of mechanisms to include worker voice and agency in the workplace, including recognizing workers’ right to engage in concerted efforts to improve working conditions and contribute to workplace decisions.

Establishing these minimum standards will provide much-needed motivation for states and workforce development boards receiving federal recovery funding to improve the quality of jobs

that workers enrolled in the programs they support are able to obtain, and give states with higher costs of living the ability to set standards appropriate for their economies.

Where possible, funding should be structured so that it can be used for High Road Training Partnerships and similar long-term, equity-centered, demand-driven programs that are focused on expanding equitable employment in high-quality careers. Funding can also be structured to ensure workers that were laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic are prioritized in rehiring. To be effective, it will also be important to fund workers' rights training and enforcement.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations to enhance workforce development opportunities. If you would like to get in touch with us about these recommendations, please contact Jacob Denney with SPUR at JDenny@SPUR.org or Avo Makdessian with Silicon Valley Community Foundation at AMakdessian@siliconvalleycf.org

Sincerely,

City of Oakland
Bay Area Council
California Reinvestment Coalition
Canal Alliance
East Bay Community Foundation
Jewish Vocational & Career Counseling Service (JVS)
Jobs with Justice San Francisco
REDF
Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center
San Francisco Foundation
Silicon Valley Community Foundation
SPUR
Working Partnerships USA

CC: The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
The Honorable Alex Padilla
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Mark DeSaulnier