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Tradeswomen Now and Tomorrow (TNT)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PERKINS ACT REAUTHORIZATION

Vocational education serves as a key point of introduction and route to entry into high-skill, high-wage careers. However, significant occupational segregation persists in the vocational education system. Ninety-six percent of cosmetology students are female, as are 87% of those enrolled in child care courses, and 86% of those enrolled in health aide preparation courses. Meanwhile, girls comprise less than six percent of the students enrolled in courses to prepare for carpentry, automotive, and plumbing.¹

The pervasive sex segregation of female students into traditionally female programs severely compromises their future earning power. For example, cosmetologists earn a median hourly salary of \$8.49 and childcare workers earn a median hourly salary of \$7.43. In contrast, students in the predominantly male, higher-wage careers can expect to earn median hourly salaries of an average of at least \$20 as plumbers, electricians or mechanical drafters.²

It is essential that active measures be taken to expose all women and girls to high-skill, high-wage occupations (many of which are nontraditional for women), and to reduce gender stereotyping in all aspects of the vocational education system.

Provide funding for programs that support students preparing for nontraditional employment.

Gender equity programs have opened doors for thousands of women and girls to pursue high-skill, high-wage nontraditional employment. The need for gender equity programs is as great as ever. However, the Perkins Act as currently structured is failing to drive funding to these critical programs and services. Competing pressures for funds at the local level and lack of guidance from state agencies have resulted in the closing of programs and the elimination of services for women and girls. *Invisible Again*, a national survey of programs conducted by the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, reported a 71% decrease in funding; more than half reported that they are unable to provide essential student services.

Close the gap between the requirements of Local Plans and Local Use of Funds.

Current law requires local plans to describe strategies and programs for special populations and how funds will be spent for nontraditional training and employment. However, *there is no requirement that local funds be used to carry out these plans*. Strategies and programs for special populations and nontraditional training and employment must be a required use of these funds.

¹ Source: Title IX and Equal Opportunity in Vocational and Technical Education: A Promise Still Owed to the Nation's Young Women, 2002, National Women's Law Center.

² *Ibid.*

A national coalition of tradeswomen's organizations and advocates.

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Perkins Act Reauthorization**

Strengthen accountability measures, particularly for improving participation and completion rates of students preparing for nontraditional occupations (the “fourth core indicator” of performance).

Current law makes no distinction among nontraditional occupations. The focus on nontraditional training is to assure access and equity in training for high-skill, high-wage jobs. The definition of nontraditional occupations needs to be refined to assure that vocational education dollars are going toward training for jobs that provide self-sufficiency.

Maintain strong accountability reporting requirements to ensure success of special populations students.

Research by the National Women’s Law Center revealed that women and girls remain under-represented in high-wage/high-skill training programs and that access to this training is being denied. Realistic and rigorous performance measures are necessary to improve participation and completion rates of students preparing for nontraditional occupations. Local entities must be held accountable for these measures and for ensuring that “special populations” (which includes students preparing for nontraditional occupations) are performing at the same level as other students.

Provide a state-level leadership position with responsibility for gender equity programming, professional development and technical assistance.

The state gender equity coordinator has played a key role in helping to make the vocational education system more equitable and improving access for women and girls. The full-time Gender Equity Coordinator position is necessary to administer equity programs and to provide leadership and visibility on the importance of equity issues.

Provide comprehensive preparatory services.

Re-entrants to the workforce, displaced homemakers, single parents and welfare recipients must be provided personal and career counseling, assessment, life-skills development, career exploration, transferable skill identification, exposure to nontraditional occupations and self-sufficiency measurements to make informed decisions about career and technical education training and employment. These preparatory services should be required.

Revise the definition of support services.

The current definition of support services fails to address a number of critical needs that affect women’s ability to succeed in vocational education. The definition should be revised to include dependent care, transportation assistance, tuition assistance, and other education-related services.