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Tradeswomen Now and Tomorrow (TNT)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT (WIA) REAUTHORIZATION

WIA is the cornerstone of the nation's workforce development system. Yet, it fails to meet the single most critical objective for women: to assist them to achieve economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families.

A key strategy for assisting women to attain self-sufficiency is to assist them to learn about, train for and enter high-skill, high-wage occupations, including those in the skilled trades. Given that many such occupations are nontraditional for women, it is necessary to focus specific efforts in this arena in order to overcome the variety of barriers that have tended to prevent women from entering nontraditional jobs.

While there are a number of provisions in WIA designed to encourage state and local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to provide such assistance, these services remain a rarity within the WIA system. Five years of WIA implementation have clearly demonstrated that clearer and stronger provisions are needed in order to ensure that women are able to be successful in pursuing high-skill, high-wage nontraditional training and employment, including skilled trades occupations.

Strengthen state plan language addressing efforts to increase women's entry into high-wage jobs.

Current law requires states to include a description of how they will serve individuals seeking nontraditional occupations, low-income individuals, displaced homemakers, and single parents. States should also be required to describe the proposed impact of such policies and programs and how their success will be measured.

Require states to use a portion of funds reserved for statewide activities to support programs that serve women seeking high-skill, high-wage nontraditional jobs.

These activities are currently allowable under the "governor's reserve." However, this option is substantially underutilized. These activities should be a required use of funds.

Ensure that career guidance and planning include a full awareness of career options with self-sufficiency as the goal.

All one-stop customers should receive information on high-wage jobs that do not require four-year degrees, including skilled trades and others that are nontraditional for women, and they should be assessed for their suitability and interest in these jobs. A career plan should include an assessment of skills, aptitudes, abilities and supportive service needs that meet the goal of connecting jobseekers to supportive services, and the long-term goal of making them economically self-sufficient.

Make supportive services available.

One-stops must assure that the absence of support services does not deter women from participating in employment and training. Current law requires that all other avenues for support services be exhausted before WIA funds are used. One-stops should either provide supportive services or ensure that women have access to them through other providers.

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Require technical assistance to state and local WIA staff in serving women who are training for nontraditional jobs.

Local and state one-stops should have access to technical assistance to help them fulfill their requirements for developing plans and designing services for individuals seeking nontraditional training.

Ensure accountability for moving women and all families toward economic self-sufficiency:

- States should report actual wages in relation to the goal of self-sufficiency. In addition, states should adopt, calculate or commission a self-sufficiency standard against which to measure progress. All self-sufficiency data should be reported by race and gender.
- States and/or the Department of Labor should produce reports that, at a minimum, describe demographic characteristics of participants, including race, ethnicity, gender and age; as well as occupations participants enter, including specific break-outs for nontraditional occupations.
- States and the Department of Labor should make demographic and other information available to the public and policymakers, so that the effectiveness of WIA in serving different populations can be determined.
- States should report what kinds of services they provide. Currently, states do not have to report how funds are spent among core, intensive and training services. Without this information, we cannot know the efficacy of services.

Increase funding for WIA and designate a significant portion for training services.

Significant expenditures have been made on building one-stop infrastructures since the passage of WIA. This has diverted funds that could go to actual training services. Congress should designate adequate funding for training.

Eliminate the sequential system of service delivery.

The sequential system of service delivery has resulted in a range of negative consequences for job seekers, from time lost to a search for jobs for which they are not qualified or that pay too little for them to support their families, to local interpretations that bar entry to training altogether.

Ensure that youth programs provide full information, access and assistance to help girls learn about and pursue high-skill, high-wage nontraditional occupations:

- Require that the state plan describe how it will ensure that youth will be assisted to explore and pursue high-skill, high-wage nontraditional career options. Require that the state include providers of nontraditional training services among its list of eligible providers for youth services.
- Add to youth program elements a requirement to provide information about average wages for a range of jobs, including high-skill, high wage nontraditional and technology jobs, and information about self-sufficiency wages for a range of family sizes and types.
- Program elements should include instruction in basic economic literacy that is necessary for them to plan for a solid financial future and work toward self-sufficiency.
- Summer employment opportunities, work experiences, internships and job shadowing should place a priority on exposing youth to technology and high-skill, high-wage nontraditional jobs.