

Friday, December 8

Hello, AFOP:

Late yesterday, the House Education and the Workforce Committee released its bipartisan WIOA reauthorization bill. I am happy to report that the measure preserves NFJP as a national program and largely leaves our program alone, except for a few non-NFJP-specific changes I mention below. Having titled it, “A Stronger Workforce for American Act” (H. R. 6655) – I’m calling it the “sway” bill – the panel intends to approve the measure Tuesday. There’s no word yet on when or if House leadership will schedule the legislation for floor votes.

AFOP’s Kendra Moesle and I each looked at the bill last night and this morning and were on a call this afternoon with committee staff to learn more about their plan. The staff described the bill as a “true compromise” that seeks to make the workforce system more efficient and effective. The measure simply amends WIOA as opposed to creating a completely new law to replace WIOA (as WIOA did in replacing WIA in 2014). It would provide states with added program flexibility and stresses pay-for-performance and the need for evidence-based programs.

As mentioned above, the bill would continue NFJP as a national program, that being our paramount goal in reauthorization. It would not substantially alter WIOA Sec. 167 and would retain the WIOA provision that allows for part of mainline Youth appropriations over a certain amount to go toward farmworker youth activities. (This provision, WIOA Sec. 127, has already resulted in over \$1 million in farmworker youth grants over the last three years.) SWAA would also codify the language we have secured for the last few years in the DOL appropriations bill providing ETA authority to begin processing NFJP grant plans April 1, instead of July 1, as in recent past years. It would also authorize NFJP appropriations at a level that is three percent higher (at \$100.3 million) than Congress appropriated in fiscal year 2023 (\$97.4 million). The NFJP amendments also include some language regarding NFJP obligation authority. We’re trying now to get an explanation of its intent.

SWAA would also make other changes to workforce system programs (including NFJP). Happily, the bill would do away with one-stop partner infrastructure-cost agreements (IFAs), but leaves the door open for one-stops to try to negotiate with partners if the one-stops run short on infrastructure funds. (State infrastructure processes would still be in effect and many partners are state entities. Also, staff stressed that any cost sharing must be proportionate to use.) The measure would also direct DOL to access wage records to help it prove workforce system performance. We would hope that such access might also provide NFJP grantees with fuller and more timely data. Lastly, the legislation would cap programs’ administrative costs at 10 percent. Should IFAs go away, perhaps this won’t be so hard to bear. Also, we think suppressing admin cost might mean more room under the cap for related assistance, but we need to hear from grantees about that.

Other systemwide changes would include making the fourth-quarter measure more like a retention measure, but the participant would need not be in the same job. The bill would also make the measurable skills gain more flexible, converting it to a six-month rolling measure, so a grantee that enrolls a new participant near the end of the term won’t have a no-result count against its performance.

Meanwhile, the staffers said they have heard that the Senate's workforce committee is now starting to turn to WIOA reauthorization. AFOP has already provided its NFJP policy priorities to the panel and hopes to see a very good bill come out of committee. That is our goal.

Thank you for all your hard work in delivering for ETA its very best grant program. It's because of you that we see the Republican House bill retaining NFJP and increasing its funding authorization.

With warm regards,
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