

# The R.I. Workforce Alliance

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To: Chair Hannah Gallo and Members of the Senate Committee on Education

Re: S-816. Proposal to Move the Adult Education Delivery System from RIDE to DLT

Date: May 29, 2019

Submitted by: The R.I. Workforce Alliance (by Linda Katz, Policy Director, The Economic Progress Institute)

The R.I. Workforce Alliance is a multi-stakeholder group including community agencies that provide training and foundational workforce skills (aka “adult education”), business, labor, philanthropic organizations and advocates. The Alliance’s mission is to improve the skills of the Rhode Island workforce with a particular focus on opportunities for lower-skilled residents and English language learners.

In considering the proposal to move responsibility for the Adult Education Delivery System from the RI Department of Education (RIDE) to the Governor’s Workforce Board (GWB), we urge the General Assembly to put in place certain guardrails and protections to ensure that the quality, scope and structure of the current delivery system are maintained. We propose changes S-816 to effectuate these protections, the substance of which are:

- Ensure that adult education is maintained as a delivery system, not simply a set of programs and that the system provides access to basic skills services to help adults improve literacy not only to be workers, but to be active parents and informed citizens, as well.
- Require that funding from the Job Development Fund (JDF) for the adult education delivery system will not be less than the JDF investment in state fiscal year 2019. Provide that total funding will be prioritized to meet the needs of adults with limited basic skills (reading, writing, math, English language acquisition), people with disabilities and others who face challenges to obtaining/maintaining employment.
- Expand funding for the adult education system by requiring that if a school district develops an alternative learning plan (ALP) for a 16 or 17 year old that includes services from the adult education system, the district will contribute to the cost of providing those services.
- Include representation from adult education providers and learners on the adult education and employment advisory committee as well as representation from the Office of Library and Information Services, which is an important adult education provider. Ensure opportunity for stakeholder input to state plans.
- Require that the director of the office of adult education and literacy has experience providing or administering adult education services.
- Extend the time limit for implementation and provide for an orderly transfer of authority.

Ensure that adult education is maintained as a delivery system that provides access to basic skills services to meet a range of needs s

The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is the main source of federal policy and funding to states to assist job seekers with accessing employment, education, training and support services they need to succeed in the labor market. Title II of the Act is the Adult Education and Family Literacy program administered by the US Department of Education.

While the WIOA law focuses on employment and economic opportunity, Title II recognizes the critical importance of adult literacy in all aspects of adult life, “to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society.”

Adult literacy is not only vital to ensuring adults can find work or move up the job ladder, but has been shown to impact public health outcomes, public school outcomes, and the well-being of our communities. It has been well researched that low literacy skills in adults:

- Increases the risk for many adverse health outcomes for individuals and families and unnecessary health care costs. Low literacy is said to be connected to over \$230 billion a year in health care costs because almost half of Americans cannot read well enough to comprehend health information, incurring higher costs.<sup>1</sup>
- Negatively impacts children’s success in school when parents have low skills. Children whose parents have low literacy levels have a 72 percent chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves. These children are more likely to get poor grades, display behavioral problems, have high absentee rates, repeat school years, or drop out.<sup>2</sup>
- Often leads to lower level of civic participation. Low education attainment is strongly correlated with lower voting rates, as shown by data from the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey.<sup>3</sup>
- Are much higher among people who are incarcerated. Thirty five percent of the ACI prison population had less than a 12<sup>th</sup> grade education and an additional 56% do not have formal education beyond HS diploma or GED, according to Rhode Island Department of Corrections 2017 Annual Population Report

We are pleased that the proposed statute (Chapter 102.2) maintains the broad purposes of adult education and acknowledges that there is an “adult education delivery system” (42-102.2-2). **We propose that that “Categories of Adult Education Program and Services” be amended so that funds are targeted to the key services provided by the system: basic education (Category 1), Career and**

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<sup>1</sup> Low Health Literacy and Health Outcomes: An Updated Systematic Review. Annals of Internal Medicine. 2011 July; 155(2):97-107

<sup>2</sup> Parental involvement in children's education: A review study about the effect of parental involvement on children's school education with a focus on the position of illiterate parents. A review study. 2010 Jan. The Effect of Parents’ Literacy Skills and Children’s Preliteracy skills on the risk of Dyslexia. J Abnormal Child Psychol. 2014; 42(7): 1187-1200

<sup>3</sup> November voting and Registration Supplement 1986 through 2016. Accessed at <http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/demographics>

**Technical Education (Category 2), Access to Higher Education (Category 3), and Supportive Services (Category 7). Categories 4, 5, and 6 should be omitted. (42-102.2-6).**

Funding for the Adult Education System, Prioritizing Services for Basic Skills and Including Funding from School Districts for ALP students

Current funding for the adult education system at RIDE is approximately \$9.3 million, including \$2.3 million in federal Title II WIOA funds, \$2.3 in general revenue (including the required state match for WIOA funding), \$3.5 million from the Job Development Fund, and \$1 million in federal TANF funds (for a program targeted to parent enrolled in RI Works). The JDF allocation for the adult education system began in 2004 in recognition of the significant need for basic skills and English language acquisition among the adult workforce. The allocation reached a peak of \$4.7 million in SFY 2010 and has been \$3.5 million since SFY 2011.

There still is a need to expand access to basic skills services to improve economic security for families and address racial disparities in reaching economic security as well as to ensure that employers have the skilled workforce they need.

- Need for English language services: 32,600 working age adults (18-64) speak English not well or not at all. Seventy four percent are Spanish language speakers.
- Among adults age 25 and older, 6% have less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education, 8% have a 9-12 grade education and 27% have a high school diploma or equivalent.
- There are significant disparities across racial/ethnic groups: Fourteen percent of the population 25 and older have less than a high school diploma including 10% among Whites, 35% among Latinos and 21% among Blacks. Twenty-seven percent have a high school diploma or equivalent, including 27% among Whites, 29% among Latinos and 28% among Blacks.<sup>4</sup>

**We recommend that the proposed statute be amended at Section 42-102.2-10 to provide that: Allocation from the Job Development Fund shall be no less than \$3.5 million per year. Section 42-102.2-6(c) (pertaining to 16 and 17 year olds) should be amended to add the following language: “The framework shall include a formula for contribution by the school district to the adult education provider who provides such services.”**

Adult Education and Employment Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee will play an important role in assuring that the Adult Education Delivery System is responsive to worker and employer needs, ensures efficient delivery of high quality services, is known to and accessible to the various populations that need these services, provides transparency regarding funding and program outcomes and more. We fully support having the state agencies that are involved in providing adult education services serve on an advisory council to ensure there is coordination across the agencies, **but we also think it is vital to include representation from the service providers and**

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<sup>4</sup> Economic Progress Institute analysis of US Census Bureau American Community Survey data, 2011-2015.

**adult learners. In addition, there is one state agency that provides adult education services that has been omitted from the list – the Office of Library and Information Services. While the proposed language permits the GWB to add additional members to the advisory committee we think it’s important to have statutorily required “seats” for OLIS, learners and providers.**

We recommend the following changes to 42-102.1-1: **add to the mandatory members of the advisory committee: the Director of the Office of Library and Information Services, two adults who are either currently or formerly enrolled in an adult education program and two staff from adult education programs.**

The statute (41-102.2-6) should be amended to provide that the **board shall ensure that the state plan, renewals, amendments or updates shall be made available for public comments at least sixty days prior to adoption.**

We also request clarification of the state plan: **is this the state plan required to be submitted under the WIOA requirement (which has been submitted and is subject to amendment and renewal), or is there a separate state plan anticipated to be developed by the new office of adult education and literacy?**

#### Director of the Office of Adult Education and Literacy

As described above, while the adult education delivery system is a critical part of the workforce development system, it also has a major role to play in improving residents’ literacy for other reasons which also serve important public purposes (better health, educational outcomes for children). In addition, teaching adult learners requires certain skill sets, an ability to implement innovative practices, knowledge of how to provide integrated education and training services, and an understanding of the social and practical challenges faced by low-skilled adult learners.

For these reasons, we recommend that the **director of the office of adult education and literacy have experience providing or administering adult education services and that this qualification be added to Section 42-102.2-3(d).**

#### Effective Date and Transition

**We recommend moving the implementation date to June, 2020**, to allow time for the transition to happen without disruption to services and to ensure that all necessary processes and procedures are in place. Whether implementation is December, 2019, as proposed, or June, 2020, as we suggest, **the statute should require the creation of a transition team that** includes state agency representatives (who will be serving on the advisory committee), practitioners, and other knowledgeable stakeholders who will ensure that the transition from RIDE to DLT protects continuity of services for adult learners and stability for programs, addresses funding issues (e.g., the current grants run through June 2021, renewable annually if meeting outcomes), transfer of systems, training for staff, etc..