



September 26, 2023

The Honorable Burgess Owens
Chair
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
House Education and the Workforce Committee
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Owens:

On behalf of the National Retail Federation (NRF), I write to thank you for calling today's hearing titled, "Strengthening WIOA: Improving Outcomes for Jobseekers, Employers, and Taxpayers." Since the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014, the workforce and the overall economy have seen dramatic structural changes. NRF applauds the Committee for its work in finding ways of modernizing the law and urges you to consider revisions that increase opportunity for job seekers at all skill levels.

The National Retail Federation passionately advocates for the people, brands, policies and ideas that help retail succeed. From its headquarters in Washington, D.C., NRF empowers the industry that powers the economy. Retail is the nation's largest private-sector employer, contributing \$3.9 trillion to annual GDP and supporting one in four U.S. jobs — 52 million working Americans. For over a century, NRF has been a voice for every retailer and every retail job, educating, inspiring and communicating the powerful impact retail has on local communities and global economies.

Almost a decade has passed since President Obama signed WIOA into law. Congress should now find meaningful ways to improve WIOA and assist employers in filling job openings with qualified workers. WIOA reforms must ensure that workforce centers provide training programs that teach the jobseeker the skills needed to secure and thrive. As such, NRF suggests that the Committee consider language that fosters the opportunity for job seekers to obtain industry recognized credentials that teach basic, foundational skills. Not every person wants or is ready for a full-time, salaried role and our workforce system should have the flexibility to accommodate jobseekers looking for their first job.

Furthermore, Congress should consider revisions to WIOA to provide adequate funding for job seekers to pursue "micro credentials." Such credentials are earned over days, not years, and allow job seekers to demonstrate they possess specific skills that are required for securing a

job or a promotion. Examples include credentials conveying competence in customer service, sales, and conflict de-escalation.

Similarly, the Committee should consider language embracing asynchronous educational programs that allow learners to access training programs anywhere at any time. Such programs do not require or depend on classroom settings and may be helpful to those Americans who struggle to access training centers due to lack of transportation options or childcare responsibilities.

Again, NRF looks forward to working with you as you modernize WOIA. Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David French". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "D" and a cursive "F".

David French
Senior Vice President
Government Relations