

2019 Appropriation Testimony
Rep. Thomas R. Suozzi

- Thank you, Chairwoman DeLauro, and thank you Ranking Member Cole, and other members of the committee.
- I am here, today, to speak about two appropriation requests that are important to me, my district, and to the United States of America. The Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
- The Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults is a national organization. It is the only one of its type. It was formed in 1967, and it's unique in that it serves a population that is deaf and blind- deaf-blind combined. You can imagine how important this organization is in the lives of these folks that are confronting being deaf and blind at the same time.
- Right now, it is estimated that the number of deaf-blind Americans can go up dramatically by the year 2020 as the population ages out. This group services adults that are over 16 years of age, and they travel from all over the country to come to this facility, as well as a having regional centers that provide, what you would characterize as outpatient services.
- I urge the committee to increase the Helen Keller National Center's 2019 funding from 13.5 million to 16 million dollars. The additional funding 2.5 million dollars is crucial to strengthen the Helen Keller National Center's service and to expand its capacity to transform the lives of deaf-blind Americans.
- This small investment in the Helen Keller National Center will have a miraculous impact on the lives of America's deaf-blind citizens. The Helen Keller National Center has excelled in building a national

network among professionals and service providers with 11 regional offices, and now it's time to give the Helen Keller National Center this critical funding it needs to strengthen its services and build greater capacity across our country.

- In my written testimony I go through some of the things that they would spend the additional money on. I'm not going to read that to you now, but I'll submit it, if that is admissible Madam Chairwoman.
- Next, I urge this committee increase investments in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to \$250 million, to expand apprenticeship programs for Fiscal Year 2020.
- Wages in America have been stagnant since the late 1970's. Decreasing unionization, globalization, automation, and increasing healthcare costs have all contributed. To earn more in today's economy, you must also learn more.
- For two decades, we have pushed young people to attend college and major in STEM courses, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. And we should!
- Yet 60% of Americans do not attend college. We need to encourage more high school students and high school graduates to pursue non-college, post high school apprenticeship programs so they can acquire the skills necessary to obtain skilled jobs as plumbers, electricians, carpenters, welders, computer machinists, quality control experts, radio frequency technicians, mechanics and more. These skills are in high demand, they pay excellent wages and require only the skills education that WIOA programs must fund.
- Back home, I created a task force to bring together the existing WIOA funded programs, along with local governments, chambers of commerce, community colleges, high school vocational programs, and union leaders to devise a one-stop system where employers can

identify their labor needs, employees can seek opportunities and educational and training programs can provide the skills that employees need to help them land jobs that will pay more.

- Furthermore, we are trying to address the stigma that occurs, much too often in America, when someone doesn't get a college degree.
- To illustrate I want to close with the story from my hometown. (plumber story)
- The key to the middle class's future lies in supporting labor. To do this, we must increase our investments in non-college, post-secondary education programs so that we can teach the skills which are essential to sustaining the American middle class for generations to come.