



4432 N. Ravenswood Ave.
Chicago, IL 60640

P 773.728.9769
F 773.728.9785

November 4, 2020

Re: Recommendations for Equitable Workforce Development in Illinois

Honorable Members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

The outlook for working people in 2020 is dire. COVID-19 has devastated an already inequitable labor market and left many families without a lifeline. Over 2.4 million Illinoisans have filed for unemployment benefits since March, and the state unemployment rate remains high at over 10%. Families are still struggling to access work. The burdens of the pandemic and ensuing economic crisis are hitting communities of color in Illinois the hardest. Workers of color continue to disproportionately face employment barriers, including occupational segregation, disinvestment, housing, transportation, child care issues, and others. Added to this, the challenges of COVID-19's health and economic impacts have left many more households unsure how they will stay housed or fed, let alone how they will advance their career.

Illinois must prioritize state and federal funding to invest in education, skills training, and barrier removal to build the foundation for a widely-shared recovery and re-skill the workforce for a new landscape. Ninety-five percent of job training dollars in Illinois comes from dwindling federal investments, which have decreased over 30% in real terms over the past two decades. The federal response has not included nearly enough for workforce development, despite unprecedented numbers of unemployed Illinoisans in need of help getting back to work. **I am writing to call on legislators to prioritize investments in helping working Illinoisans return to work by funding workforce development programs, designing policy to remove employment barriers that create disparities, and promoting more effective data transparency between state agencies serving Illinoisans, to both help the state better address this economic crisis and to allow our residents to thrive.**

Jane Addams Resource Corporation (JARC) is dedicated to promoting strong communities, businesses and households to ensure that people who work do not live in poverty.

We proudly serve low-income, unemployed, and underemployed job seekers in the Chicagoland region. Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on our trainees, but they faced challenges with securing quality employment that predate the pandemic. JARC's trainees face several barriers to employment, including limited education, criminal records, housing insecurity, and transportation barriers limiting their access to manufacturing jobs not accessible by public transportation. JARC works to address these barriers, but state investment and commitment to these issues and individuals is crucial, now more than ever.

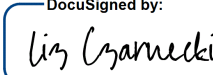
To support the trainees who we serve, we recommend the following policy priorities:

1. **Use a racial equity lens to invest state funding in inclusive sector skills training and career pathways programming** to ensure shared economic recovery for Illinoisans who face barriers to employment.
 - Support job seekers on SNAP by **investing state dollars in SNAP Employment & Training** (since every dollar is eligible for a federal match.)

- **Restore and increase funding for the Job Training and Economic Development (JTED) Program** to connect adults with skills training in in-demand sectors, ensuring that low-income individuals and those with criminal records are prioritized, as well as the communities most impacted by disinvestment.
 - **Restore the Employment Training Investment Program (ETIP)** or a similar competitive grant making program that focuses on **Incumbent Worker Training**. Businesses that demonstrate a commitment to career advancement within their companies should be prioritized.
 - **Establish a flexible Barrier Reduction Fund** to directly assist job seekers overcome acute barriers to employment (such as childcare, housing, technology access, and transportation.)
 - **Increase funding for Adult Education and Literacy programs** to ensure every adult needing services has the opportunity to transition to skills training.
- 2. Align policy to eliminate non-skill barriers to employment disproportionately faced by people of color, women, and people identifying as LGBTQ+ in Illinois.**
- **Support Paid Sick Days** to ensure low-wage workers don't have to lose their jobs or pay due to illness and family emergencies.
 - **Eliminate driver's license suspensions** for failure to pay tickets, fines, fees, or child support, and for failure to appear in court.
 - Support policies that move us toward **universal broadband and technology access** so learners and job seekers can connect with opportunity.
- 3. Increase data sharing and transparency across state agencies that touch education and workforce training to identify and address equity gaps in our public investments.**

We believe that these policy changes will allow our trainees and Illinois job seekers to overcome barriers to employment, build the skills that they need for in-demand occupations, and retain the jobs that can support them and their families. Investing in job seekers and workers is a win-win scenario for both job seekers and employers and can help Illinois make a more equitable recovery.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Liz Czarnecki

Director of Training Services

Jane Addams Resource Corporation

