

Congressional Briefing: “Making WIA Work for Women: Reforming the Workforce Investment Act to Help Women Gain Quality Jobs and Narrow the Wage Gap”

April 7, 2010

SUMMARY

Carolyn Williams, of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers moderated the meeting. In her opening remarks she said that she herself had chosen to train as an electrician to be sure that she would always be able to support herself. She stressed the importance of good career advice and access to training for non-traditional jobs for women because typically those jobs pay 20 to 35% more than female dominated jobs.

Ariane Hegewisch, Institute for Women's Policy Research
The Workforce Investment Act, the Wage Gap and Gender Segregation in Training
Reauthorization of WIA is imperative, many people who have lost their jobs during the recession will be entering new occupations. Training and advise is also needed by those who are employed but do not make enough to support themselves and their families. WIA data shows that WIA funded services increase wages and opportunities for both men and women, but there is a big gender wage gap between male and female 'exitors'. The reasons for the earnings gap are not completely evident. Women were as likely as men to receive intensive training services, and on average were in training for substantially more weeks. Yet most women received training in female dominated jobs, and most men in male dominated jobs. Fewer than 2 % of women going through WIA training were being trained for non-traditional jobs. This matters because typically female dominated occupations pay less than male dominated occupations. The stark gender segregation in training and occupations is often explained by "choice". Yet research conducted by IWPR and Legal Momentum a few years ago suggests that women often 'chose' typically female occupations because they did not know of alternative options and had not received information about the impact of their 'choices' on earnings and benefits. To view background documents: click [here](#) for the IWPR Briefing Paper on WIA, click [here](#) for the IWPR Fact Sheet on the Gender Wage Gap, and click [here](#) for the executive summary of the IWPR report *Working First but Working Poor*

Susan Rees, Wider Opportunities for Women
Tailoring WIA Services for Women's Self-Sufficiency

Susan Rees emphasized that the majority of women who enter On-Stop Advice Centers face additional barriers: they might be the victims of domestic violence; might have been

out of the job market for a while because they were looking after their kids; might be older and face particular discrimination in the labor market; or might be single mothers. They need wrap around services and financial supports (and some financial supports were authorized through the ARRA funding), particularly to organize childcare and transportation, and careful advise. Career advice should be focused on identifying occupations which can provide self-sufficiency wages; 40 states have developed such standards (see WOW website for more detail). An important route into self-sufficiency wages is to encourage women to enter non-traditional fields, many non-traditional occupations can also be qualified as "Green Jobs", which polls show are more attractive to women. One Stop counselors need to be trained to provide targeted advise to women. There is also a need to combine adult basic education, literacy, and workforce training to make what individuals are learning more applicable and provide real-work application for learning as incentives (and retention). For more information, go to www.wowonline.org

Marie-Louise Caravatti, American Federation of Teachers
Career Advice that Counts: Workplace Learning Representatives as a Route for Career Counseling and Advocacy for Professional Development for Paraprofessionals in Education

Marie-Louise Caravatti stressed the need for public intervention to ensure that workers have sufficient information to make informed decisions about training and education. Education and training are vital for solving the nations' job crisis. In today's rapidly changing economic and technical environment, both employees and job seekers have difficulties matching skill requirements to jobs, let along continuously updating those skills to stay employed. One way of helping employees to access information are "learning representatives", a model in place in the UK. These representatives provide peer based advice, are knowledgeable of local training opportunities and are a link to the employer in terms of their assessment of future skills needs. Dr. Caravatti then discussed a pilot project developed by the AFT in Baltimore, primarily for paraprofessionals in education. Paraprofessionals have low hourly rates, and also have access to fewer paid hours in their job than higher qualified educational staff. Access to certified training is crucial, both to keep their jobs and to increase their earnings. Yet it is very difficult to find accurate information precise certification requirements, available training and its costs. The AFT has developed a directory with all training options in Baltimore for the AFT learning representatives; and it has been able to highlight and provide access to "cohort discounts" available from many colleges (of between 25 and 60% of costs per credit). Unions are arguing that professional learning advisers should become a permissible expenditure under WIA. For more information, click [here](#).

Mimi Lufkin, CEO, National Alliance for Partnership in Equity
Recruiting and Retaining Women in Non-Traditional Training and Education: Perkins Act Performance Measures and the Workforce Investment Act

Mimi Lufkin began by stressing that self-sufficiency wages are not the only reason to encourage women's greater participation in non-traditional occupations; tackling the fact that 50% of the population are virtually excluded from STEM occupations is also vital for innovation and for the USA to become more competitive in the global economy - research, and most recently the AAUW report "Why so few", firmly suggests that it is not "nature" but "nurture" that keeps women out of STEM .Her main policy focus was on

how to create accountability and performance measures in WIA. WIA already includes a considerable mandate for data collection, including on gender, race/ ethnic background, age, educational level, employment retention. It is clear that states are paying attention to performance measures. The 1009 Perkins Act (Vocational and Technical Training and Education) includes two measures not covered in WIA: recruitment and completion of the under-represented sex in training and education programs (e.g. women as carpenters; men as nurses). This measure was introduced in 1998, but until penalties for non-performance were introduced in 2006 many states did not really pay attention. These measures are an appropriate model for WIA funded programs. NAPE is currently working with nine states, as part of a NSF funded research project, to evaluate the effect of integrating gender accountability in STEM and non-traditional jobs training programs. Given the importance of outcome measures under WIA, including (or not) such gender accountability measures will send important signals for what is seen as important by policy makers.

Click [here](#) for the statement on WIA reauthorization by the National Coalition for Women, Jobs and Jobs Training (NCWJTT).

Discussion:

Question: There are currently 17 accountability measures in WIA, states complain that all the do is measure. How much more can/ should we ask of them? How does this fit into the discussions to get "common data" across federal programs?

Mimi Lufkin: Accountability measures speak to policy priorities. They are important. That said, such performance measures would not require additional data collection - this data is already being collected, it is just not being analyzed; and all the analysis would require is an additional computer programming command.

Question: Do we have any evidence of older women being more likely to lose jobs or face discrimination?

Ariane Hegewisch: In terms of official unemployment figures, young people (under 25) have much higher rates of unemployment than other age groups, and older workers (55 plus) are the only age group who, during the recession, have seen a slight increase in employment rates. Yet there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that some groups, particularly workers with care giving responsibilities, are targeted when firms make lay offs.

Susan Rees: One particular problem faced by older women when they approach One-Stops is that they might seek (or be seen to seek) part-time work only; earnings measures currently are focused on full-time work (or do not look at hourly rates), providing strong incentives for One-Stops to 'discourage' anyone who they think might not work full-time.

Mal Caravatti: There is anecdotal evidence from the AFT that schools focus on older workers in lay-offs because their seniority means that they are more expensive than someone fresh out of college.

Question: The panel is suggesting a lot of new requirements for counselors in One-Stops: any proposals of how they will meet these?

Mal Caravatti: AFSCME has developed a proposal for professional standards and enhanced training for workers in employment services. Technology can also play a role in providing easier access to relevant information.

Question: You discussed the question of 'choice'. How to measure the quality of 'choice'?

Ariane Hegewisch: The quality of choice reflects the quality of advice provided: whether job and training seekers received comprehensive information about the wages & benefits available in different occupations, the demand for those occupations, and the type of training programs available.

Mimi Lufkin: One way of approaching the quality of 'choice' is to look at inputs (information, supports, outreach in training programs) – where workers given the support and advice necessary to allow them to follow their choices; and outcomes (retention, employment, etc). During the first years of the Perkins Act there was considerable research on the former; now, and under WIA, there is much more emphasis on the latter.