

Testimony of Peter Callstrom
Chief Executive Officer and President, San Diego Workforce Partnership
Before the Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives

Innovation Forum and Showcase

July 25, 2018

It is an honor to be with you today. Thank you to Congresswoman Susan Davis for her invitation and her tireless efforts and advocacy in our region to serve our communities.

Thanks to your support of WIOA, our national workforce development system is stronger, more responsive, more innovative and more effective than ever. The positive changes in WIOA have enabled local workforce boards to innovate and efficiently deliver services that are tailored to unique regional needs. Local control is vital as each region is unique. This system works incredibly well.

The foundational WIOA funding cannot and is not intended to be able do it all. WIOA is the essential stimulus that allows us to serve our communities and to innovate as intended in this landmark legislation. There are many examples how we have been able to leverage this invaluable federal funding to have a far greater impact in our communities. I'm happy to share a few with you today.

WIOA supports 2500 career centers (also known as "America's Job Centers") throughout our country, providing a broad array of services to serve all jobseekers, with a focus on supporting individuals with barriers to employment. More than 4 million Americans utilize the centers nationwide. In the San Diego region we serve more than 100,000 visitors annually with customized person-centered solutions that meet each person's unique needs. One size does not fit all. Multiple and tailored services are essential. The public workforce system is at the center of addressing the skills gap. However, the skills gap exists due to other gaps – awareness gaps of careers and pathways to in-demand jobs and also opportunity gaps. Barriers exist for many unfortunate reasons which leads to fewer opportunities for work experiences and educational advancement. We are working to close these gaps every single day.

We have leveraged and expanded your WIOA investment in many ways in San Diego. We now have multiple City and County contracts; multiple private sector investors and sponsors; and millions of

dollars in philanthropic investment from foundations including; Walmart, JP Morgan Chase, James Irvine, Bank of America, the Aspen Institute, and more. Thanks to Bank of America the career center space cost in our new downtown library reaches thousands of jobseekers.

As a result of WIOA and the resulting public, private and philanthropic collaborative, we have implemented many new initiatives that are serving tens of thousands of additional people – many with significant barriers to employment. To address the growing youth disconnection crisis, in 2013 we created a young adult employment program that we call ‘Connect2Careers’. In year one, we had 500 applicants. Now in our 5th year, we have more than 15,000 applicants.

In 2016 we launched “Reentry Works San Diego” – a jail-based career center for those who are incarcerated. By winning highly competitive DOL grant, we have leveraged additional local resources to serve 1000 exiting inmates. Typical recidivism for those who don’t receive services is 60-70%. Thanks to “Reentry Works”, recidivism for our graduates has plummeted to only 10%.

Convening our community is another critical service and purpose of workforce boards. We now hold multiple convenings, drawing thousands of attendees. These gatherings are essential to promote awareness of career opportunities and pathways. As well, bringing together disparate stakeholders leads to powerful connections that help create positive results for our jobseekers and employers.

Techhire is another great initiative. In partnership with regional partners and employers, we will empower more than 1,000+ young adults — including 150 veterans — to begin in-demand tech careers.

This year we will launch a new employment service for those experiencing homelessness. A critical component to providing hope and solving homelessness involves employment. By braiding public and private resources and in partnership with elected leaders and our local continuum of care, we will provide wrap-around employment services for hundreds of individuals.

Create funding models are also critical to long-term sustainability and deeper community impact. We are helping to pave the way by implementing new models including ‘Pay For Performance’, ‘Income Sharing Agreements’ and a ‘Social Enterprise Accelerator’. These innovative approaches involve new partnerships that previously didn’t exist, enabling us to extend WIOA’s core investment with nonfederal funds.

Ongoing labor market research is central to successful workforce development. We need to understand where the jobs are, what employers need and how to support workers to acquire the skills needed in our rapidly changing economy. Thousands of jobs exist today that weren't imagined just a few years ago. The same phenomena of rapid change will continue and even accelerate. New jobs require new skills and experiences. We have released many in-depth reports that shine a light on our economy – furthering understanding and helping us to shape how and who we fund so that we maximize resources. To extend the value of our research, we created poster boards and other educational materials that are now being used by educators throughout our region. Thousands of our unique sector boards are displayed in classrooms – reaching kids and piquing their interest in the vast options that will be available to them. This is critical because we know an important reality: “How can kids aspire to careers that they don't know exist?” With our extensive research and innovative ways of sharing this invaluable data, we embrace the knowledge that lifelong learning is crucial to a successful career journey.

At the National Association of Workforce Boards' annual forum in Washington, DC in March the San Diego Workforce Partnership received the “WIOA Trailblazer Award” which recognizes a workforce board that has been a leader in adopting the system changes envisioned in WIOA. We are deeply honored but know that we have much more work ahead. Though our economy is strong now, millions are still unemployed and underemployed. We can never lose sight of the fact that millions rely on the public workforce system – in good times and bad. Know that your support of WIOA and other public workforce funding is making a profoundly positive difference in the lives of countless individuals, families and our economy. Your investment in jobseekers is paying off in quality jobs, new skills and extensive partnerships with the private sector. WIOA works and we thank you for making this great American success story possible.

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*San Diego Workforce Partnership • Workforce Development Board (WDB) for the County of San Diego
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