

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education and,  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education and,  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We are writing to urge the inclusion in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill of at least \$35 million within the Department of Labor's (DOL) Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) Reintegration of Ex-Offenders program account to help address the ongoing crisis of unemployment among our most vulnerable populations – young people aged 16 to 24 who are both unemployed and out of school.

Nationwide, research shows that the youth disconnection rate is now 11.7 percent. That means a total of 4.6 million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are without jobs or are not connected to school, leaving these young people with inadequate education and skills that are necessary to secure quality employment and placing them at a greater risk of becoming involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Given the alarmingly high rate of youth unemployment the country faces, particularly among minority populations, there is an urgent need for federal investment programs that assist our nation's disconnected youth in attaining the skills and education demanded by the 21st century economy.

ETA's Reintegration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) Program, carried out through authority provided in Section 169 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), provides grants for both adult and youthful offenders and serves as an important federal investment in disconnected youth. We are hopeful that the Committee can increase funding for this program in the FY 2020 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill. This increase will allow the RExO competitive grant program to continue to provide critical support to the efforts of national and regional nonprofit organizations that have rich histories of demonstrated proven models in serving distressed communities and youth with the skills and knowledge necessary to be productive citizens and members of our country's workforce.

We also request that the FY 2020 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill language include "disconnected youth" in the RExO Program section. Specifically, we request the following bill language:

*Provided, That of this amount, \$35,000,000 shall be for competitive grants to national and regional intermediaries for activities that prepare young ex-offenders, school dropouts, and disconnected youth for employment, with a priority for projects serving high-crime, high-poverty areas;*

Furthermore, we request the inclusion of the following report language in this year's Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill:

*Congress finds that the DOL, ETA, RExO program should be expanded to include "disconnected youth," who reside in high crime, high poverty geographic areas as these youth are at risk of incarceration due to lower graduation rates, higher unemployment rates, and other socio-economic ills due to the lack of economic opportunities and a lack of economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families.*

Funding that is focused on assisting disconnected youth in some of the nation's most disadvantaged communities is essential to ensuring pathways to quality employment as well as to strengthening the country's economic competitiveness.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator