

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Martin J. Walsh
Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20528

Director Wendy Chun-Hoon
Women's Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Walsh and Director Chun-Hoon:

In recognition of Equal Pay Day, we write to you to emphasize the importance of increasing women's participation in registered apprenticeship programs. As you know, women have been disproportionately affected by job losses throughout the pandemic and have not enjoyed the same gains that men have received from the economic recovery. Registered apprenticeships provide an opportunity to bring women back into the workforce and onto pathways that help close the gender pay gap.

The Women's Bureau at the Department of Labor recently released a report titled "Bearing the Cost: How Overrepresentation in Undervalued Roles Hurt Women During the Pandemic," which affirmed that women—and women of color especially—have borne many of the harshest economic consequences of the pandemic. Women are overrepresented in industries and occupations that experienced the greatest job losses.¹ They also make up nearly two-thirds of all essential workers and disproportionately work in service and part-time jobs that were among the first and most impacted during the pandemic.² At home, women have shouldered additional unpaid family caregiving responsibilities as children stayed home from school and disabled family members and seniors lost access to care services.

The U.S. is now experiencing strong job gains, but the economic recovery is uneven. According to a recent analysis, 1.1 million fewer women are in the workforce compared to February 2020 and women make up 68.5 percent of net job losses since the start of the public health emergency. Just last month, 48,000 women left the labor force—and for every woman who left, nearly ten men entered the labor force.³ These impacts are exacerbating longstanding disparities in the workforce, including the gender pay gap. Among full-time, year-round workers, women earned only 83 cents for every dollar a man made in 2020 – and for women of color, that disparity is even larger. For example, Black women made 67 cents for every dollar a man made in 2020.⁴ As we rebuild our economy, we must take steps to do so equitably – that means supporting women workers, including women of color.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor (March 2022). *Bearing the Cost: How Overrepresentation in Undervalued Roles Hurt Women During the Pandemic*. Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor.

² Rho, H.J., H. Brown, and S. Fremstad (April 2020). *A Basic Demographic Profile of Workers in Frontline Industries*. Center for Economic and Policy Research.

³ Tucker, J. & B. Lepage (March 2022). *The Jobs Report Shows a Strong Month, but Black Women's Labor Force Participation Drops and Unemployment Rate Rises*. National Women's Law Center.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau (November 2021). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2020 – People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 2020, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Disability Status*. U.S. Census Bureau.

With unemployment at record lows and the economy in recovery, we have an opportunity to bring women back into the workforce in higher-quality, higher-paying jobs. Registered apprenticeships are a proven model that provide opportunities for stable employment, increased skills attainment, higher wages, and career advancement, but women participate in apprenticeships at much lower rates than men.⁵ In fact, women make up half of the workforce, yet only 12.5 percent of apprentices in 2020.⁶ In male-dominated sectors, like construction and other trades, women made up only 3.6 percent of apprentices.⁷ Before the pandemic, industries like construction, manufacturing, and infrastructure were already facing a need for skilled workers, and that demand has only grown. Registered apprenticeships are a proven pathway into these and other sectors and into high-quality, family-sustaining jobs.

We must work to increase women's participation in the labor force and expanding access to registered apprenticeships is critical to that effort. As the lead federal agency charged with carrying out the registered apprenticeship system and addressing gender disparities in the workforce, we respectfully request responses to the following questions:

1. Please provide an update on the status and effectiveness of Department of Labor initiatives to increase women's participation in registered apprenticeships.
2. How has the Department of Labor worked to reach more women through its recent apprenticeship initiatives, such as the 90-day Trucking Apprenticeship Challenge and the Apprenticeship Building America Grant Program?
3. How has the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO) grant program affected women's participation in registered apprenticeships, and how can the program be made more effective?
4. What has the Department of Labor found to be the greatest obstacles to recruiting and retaining women in registered apprenticeship programs and non-traditional occupations, and how can Congress work to address these?

We look forward to working with you to increase women's participation in registered apprenticeships and advance an equitable recovery. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator

⁵ U.S. Department of Labor (2019). [Advancing Opportunities for Women through Apprenticeship: A Case-Based Resource Guide](#). Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor.

⁶ U.S. Department of Labor (February 2021). [Discover Apprenticeship: Women in Apprenticeship](#). U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.

⁷ U.S. Department of Labor (November 2021). [Women's Bureau Updates November 2021, Issue X](#). Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor.