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April 29, 2021

The Honorable Martin J. Walsh
Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Walsh:

The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact have been devastating for all Americans, but many older workers have felt these effects particularly strongly. Last year, the unemployment rate for workers ages 55 and above rose from 2.6 percent in February to 13.6 percent in April, as millions of older workers lost their jobs. While the unemployment rate has improved in recent months, 1.7 million workers ages 55 and above remain unemployed. For those older Americans who continue to work, the threat posed by exposure to COVID-19 on the job was particularly severe, as the vast majority of deaths caused by the virus have been among those ages 50 and above.

As we work to bring an end to this pandemic and focus on how we can help all workers return to work safely, we urge the Department of Labor (DOL) to prioritize supporting older workers. With advancements in technology and medicine, Americans are living and working longer. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, by the year 2028, adults over age 55 will account for one-quarter of the workforce. The number of older workers is growing at a rate that outpaces the overall growth of the labor force. Ensuring that this large and expanding share of our country's workforce benefits fully from our nation's economic recovery is essential.

The benefits of ensuring that all older adults are able to participate and succeed in the labor force are substantial. Numerous studies have linked work with improved health and well-being, and the business case for age-friendly workplaces is strong. The hiring and retaining of older workers benefits employees, employers, consumers, job creators, and society as a whole. Older workers are also a flexible workforce and can take advantage of multiple types of employment opportunities, as many opt to stay engaged in the workforce through part-time work or self-employment opportunities in addition to full-time employment.

Supporting the aging workforce provides DOL with a critical avenue to advance economic opportunities for older Americans. To do so, attention is needed to ensure that older adults' unique needs are met in workforce programs that DOL oversees and that older workers' outcomes are tracked. We are requesting the following information to understand how DOL is assisting older workers:

1. What steps is DOL taking to track trends in workforce aging and the types of work arrangements older workers are engaged in, and how is DOL using this information to inform the Department's work and better target services?

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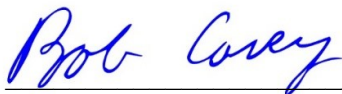
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2. What services, tools, and resources does DOL provide to older Americans as they seek to navigate workforce opportunities?
3. How have programs like the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure continued effectiveness, and what lessons have been learned from these experiences that can inform improvements to services going forward?
4. How are DOL and the Administration leveraging existing programs, such as apprenticeship initiatives, to support older workers in upskilling, reskilling, and reentering the workforce?
5. How has DOL partnered, or how does it plan to partner with the private sector to advance employment opportunities for older Americans?

As Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, we have an obligation to ensure older Americans can access quality employment opportunities, have the opportunity to remain engaged and active in the workplace, and can benefit fully from our economic recovery.

Thank you for your attention to this pivotal issue.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey Jr.
Chairman
Senate Special Committee on Aging



Tim Scott
Ranking Member
Senate Special Committee on Aging