



March 11, 2025

Russell Vought
Director
The Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Vought:

As the Trump Administration develops its fiscal year 2026 President's Budget Request (PBR), Jobs for the Future (JFF) requests that the Administration consider the following priorities to support the needs of workers, students, businesses, and our economy. JFF is a national nonprofit that drives transformation of the U.S. education and workforce systems. We want our nation's federal and state policies to eliminate dead ends that are hurting people's chances to succeed in school, at work, and in life. Our North Star is that by 2033, 75 million people facing barriers to advancement will work in quality jobs.

Education and workforce training are vital to improving pathways to good jobs and ensuring robust economic growth and global competitiveness. Yet our country's education and workforce systems—and the policies that govern them—are not keeping pace with the changing needs of learners and workers or the evolving conditions of the labor market. Today, people need a different approach that supports lifelong learning, so they can retool their skills to take advantage of new career opportunities and advance economically. JFF believes the following priorities, if expressed in the 2026 PBR, will help support our nation's economic needs, build our talent pipeline, support business, and provide pathways to good jobs for workers and students.

Expanding Pathways That Support Economic Opportunity

- **Invest in our Nation's Workforce System:** The nation's workforce system under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) must receive adequate funding and be modernized to meet the needs of America's workers and businesses while providing high-quality affordable alternatives to a four-year degree. JFF encourages the Administration to call for the reauthorization of WIOA as part of the 2026 PBR and request an increase for WIOA Title I funding for FY 2026.

- **Preserve Funding for Essential Programs that Support Workers and Business:** We encourage the Administration to at least maintain funding for essential workforce programs under the Department of Labor, including apprenticeship, Strengthening Community College Training Grants, Job Corps, the Workforce Data Quality Initiative, and skills training grants provided via H-1B funds. These programs provide critical supports to populations that we desperately need back in the workforce if we are to increase American competitiveness.
- **Reentry Employment Opportunity Grants (REO):** JFF supports the codification and expansion of the REO program which provides funding for a range of programs that are vital for improving labor market outcomes and reducing recidivism among young people involved with the justice system, as well as adults who were once incarcerated. We urge the 2026 PBR to call for this codification and expansion.

Broadening Employer Partnerships in Workforce Training

1. **Expand High-Quality Apprenticeship Programs:** We ask that the Administration support incentives to employers and intermediaries to scale high-quality apprenticeship programs. We urge that the 2026 PBR call for enactment of this proposal, which has been introduced in the Senate as the Leveraging and Energizing America's Apprenticeship Programs (LEAP) Act and would provide participating employers tax credits for hiring an apprentice and when the apprentice completes the experience.
- **Support Employer and Sector Partnerships:** We encourage the Administration to support sector strategies, which bring together employers within an industry sector to identify and align the skills needs of their workers with regional education and training opportunities. We ask that the Administration support the establishment of a grant program to support industry or sector partnerships, as well as the continuation of funding for workforce training started at the Department of Commerce in recent years.

Advancing Opportunities for Adult Learners

- **Support Funding for Programs That Advance Postsecondary Pathways and Skills:** We encourage the Administration to at a minimum, request that funding is maintained for essential programs that support adult learners, including state and national grants under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, programs that support student parents (Child Care Access Means Parents in School), and grants supporting institutions (Title III-A Strengthening Institutions program).
- **Support Workforce Pell Grants:** JFF supports the expansion of the Pell Grant program to include eligibility for students enrolled in high-quality shorter-term education and training programs. Expanding Pell will provide greater access and affordability for students enrolled

in these programs, while building our talent pipeline. We ask for the 2026 PBR to call for the enactment of Workforce Pell.

- **Preserve Student Eligibility and Awards Under the Pell Grant Program:** The Pell Grant program faces a potential shortfall in funding for upcoming award years. As part of the 2026 PBR, JFF supports additional investments in the Pell Grant program to preserve student eligibility and award levels. In addition to traditional postsecondary students, the Pell Grant program also supports access and affordability for millions of students pursuing associate's degree and nondegree credentials addressing critical populations we need to return to the workforce to ensure American competitiveness.
- **Support and Modernize Campus-Based Aid Programs:** As part of the 2026 PBR, JFF asks that the Administration request that funding is at least maintained for Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) and Federal Work Study (FWS). These programs are important tools in helping lower-income students meet their postsecondary goals. JFF also requests that the Administration call for reforms to these programs to update the formula to address disparities in institutional allocation, and to better align FWS with relevant work-based learning opportunities.
- **Ensure Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Recipients Can Pursue Education and Training Opportunities:** JFF believes that it is important to ensure that recipients of federal benefits programs, including SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid have access to quality education and training opportunities that can lead to good jobs. Often, work requirements drive individuals to find employment in the first job available rather than pursuing skills and credentials that lead to good jobs and family-sustaining wages. Additionally, we request that the PBR include support for programs like SNAP Employment and Training which remain critical to this work.

Connecting Youth and Adults to College and Careers

- **Strengthen Career and Technical Education:** As part of the 2026 PBR, we encourage the Administration to at least maintain funding for Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) state and national grant programs. Continued investment is needed to ensure we are building a highly skilled workforce that is capable of meeting the needs of employers and our state and local economies.
- **Continue Support for the Youth Apprenticeship Readiness Grants (YARG):** During the previous Trump Administration, the President initiated an Executive Order on Expanding Apprenticeships in America that focused on developing new apprenticeships in secondary and postsecondary institutions and increasing youth participation. In response, the YARG was established in 2020—helping to expand apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship to in-school and out-of-school youth. As part of the 2026 PBR, JFF encourages the Administration

to continue to support investments in this grant program, build on impact to date, and urge Congress to codify this program to ensure it receives consistent and adequate resources.

- **Scale Innovative Pathways That Blur the Lines Between High School, Postsecondary Education and Training, and Careers:** As part of the 2026 PBR, we urge the Administration to propose a competitive grant program to help states and regions design pathways that help young people advance from high school through postsecondary education and into meaningful careers. This grant program should enable governors and state agencies to facilitate statewide, cross-agency approaches for expanding college and career pathway strategies, such as dual enrollment, work-based learning, industry-recognized credentials, and career advising and navigation. The grant program should also provide funding to state and local intermediaries to support cross-sector collaboration.

Supporting Research and Innovation

2. **Bolster Education Innovation and Research:** JFF encourages the Administration to at least maintain funding for the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant program as part of its 2026 PBR. EIR has been critical for building the evidence-base and innovation for improving student achievement, particularly for dual enrollment opportunities.
- **Establish an AI Workforce Center of Excellence:** With so much yet unknown about the economic impacts and opportunities of generative AI, we urge the Administration as part of the FY 2026 PBR to call for the establishment of a workforce center of excellence focused on these issues. The center would bring together interdisciplinary experts with the aim of predicting evolving labor market impacts and skills gaps, researching and developing best-bet approaches for integrating generative AI into school curricula, workplaces, and job training programs as well as ensure centers of excellence are prepared with the technology and capacity that is needed to provide these educational and training opportunities.
 - **Support a Technology and Data Transformation Fund:** As part of the 2026 PBR, we urge the Administration to call for a Technology and Data Transformation Fund that would provide resources to states or regions to modernize their career navigation services. The fund could cover the procurement or development of career navigation tools and platforms that would be accessed across education and workforce systems, the provision of the professional development and technical assistance required for staff to appropriately use the technologies, and the procurement and integration of real-time labor market information and tools into state labor market information and career navigational systems to provide people with a better picture of job and skill demands.
3. **Encourage Market Innovation in Student Loans:** Income share agreements and outcomes-based loans are private market solutions that help students finance their

education and training goals, but they are hampered by outdated regulatory and tax treatment. As part of the 2026 PBR, JFF encourages the Administration to support legislative measures, like the Investing in Students Act, to create more space for innovation while simultaneously strengthening consumer protections.

The 2026 PBR represents an important opportunity to support education and workforce training, which are vital to improving pathways to good jobs and ensuring robust economic growth and global competitiveness. For additional information, please reach out to Karishma Merchant, JFF Associate Vice President, Policy & Advocacy, kmerchant@jff.org. We thank you for your consideration and look forward to having further conversations.

Sincerely,

Maria Flynn
President & CEO
Jobs for the Future