



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Department of Labor Agency Review Team  
**FROM:** The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
**DATE:** November 24, 2008  
**RE:** Recommendations for the U.S. Department of Labor

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is critical to accomplishing several key goals that President-elect Obama has laid out for his Administration, including creating good jobs and helping American workers move up the job ladder. DOL is also a vital agency as the nation heads into a prolonged economic downturn and unemployment rises. CLASP recommends the following actions at DOL to help rebuild the economy and ensure prosperity and opportunity for all American workers and job seekers:

**Connect employment and training services to job creation initiatives to ensure low-income individuals have access to new jobs.** President-elect Obama has expressed a commitment to rebuild America's economy and [to create or save 2.5 million jobs by January 2011 through investments in infrastructure and building a clean energy-efficient economy](#). DOL must have a key role in this effort. DOL should partner with the Departments of Energy and Transportation (and other relevant federal agencies) and state and local workforce systems to develop appropriate job training and placement programs and identify best practices to ensure that low-income and low-skilled individuals have access to the new jobs created.

**Lead the effort to ensure that America is in the business of producing good jobs.** A top priority at DOL should be revitalizing the enforcement agencies to ensure compliance with existing standards for health and safety and for wages and benefits. New legislative proposals to improve wages, working conditions and worker rights, including passage of the Employee Free Choice Act and enactment of national laws for paid sick days, and improvements and expansions of family and medical leave, all require DOL leadership. To complement these activities, the Obama Administration should appoint a "Good Jobs Czar" at DOL to coordinate efforts to improve jobs for American workers, including establishing a Center for Workplace Innovation to provide technical assistance to employers on good job design, lead the effort to [model best practices in the federal government](#), and coordinate efforts already underway to improve job quality across various federal agencies.

**Revitalize the employment and training system.** To address the increased need for employment and training services during this period of economic transformation, DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) should request significant increases for funding for existing workforce programs in the first budget request. Since 1979—the peak year of federal investment in employment and training programs—funding has declined in real terms by nearly 70 percent. In addition, DOL should revamp the workforce development system through the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in order to ensure that America has a globally competitive workforce, and that the nation's workforce system better meets the needs of low-income and low-skilled workers and job seekers, and helps dislocated workers struggling in the economic downturn.



**Implement President-elect Obama's commitment to funding for Transitional Jobs and Career Pathway programs.**

- **Transitional Jobs.** DOL/ETA should be the lead agency to administer new funding for Transitional Jobs programs and act as a clearinghouse for best practices, technical assistance, and research related to Transitional Jobs. DOL should also coordinate with other federal agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice, that administer federal funding streams which can be used for Transitional Jobs.
- **Career Pathways.** The Obama Administration's career pathway initiative for out-of-school youth and low-skill, low-income adults should be jointly run by the Department of Education and the Department of Labor. In addition to providing funding to seed creation of career pathways, the two agencies should review existing legislative and administrative policy to identify and remove barriers to collaborative work on career pathways by adult education, career and technical education, training and postsecondary education systems.

**Strengthen the role of the Youth Office within ETA to focus priority attention on reconnecting disconnected youth.** With dropout rates in excess of 50 percent in our high poverty urban and rural communities, and approximately 4 million youth between the ages of 16 and 24 out of school and out of work, ETA's Office of Youth Programs should continue to provide strategic focus on this population and provide leadership in creating alternative pathways and programs to reconnect these youth to the labor market in areas of high demand. Specifically, ETA should:

- **Target discretionary youth spending to build capacity in communities of high youth distress.** DOL should also provide technical assistance, training (including leadership and management training), coaching, and dissemination of best practice. Recently released research on the impact of the Youth Opportunity Grant Program found these grants achieved unprecedented success in building comprehensive interventions that got youth, particularly out-of-school youth, engaged in youth development activity, reconnected to education, and increased level of receipt of Pell grants.
- **Expand the federal interagency work that has been a part of the DOL "Youth Vision" work.** Efforts have been underway for the past few years within DOL and reaching down to States and local areas to bring together the labor, education, justice, and child welfare systems to develop more rational transition supports and services for young people in vulnerable situations.
- **Explore ways the Department of Labor can incent federal contractors to partner with the workforce system and youth development programs to greatly expand opportunities for youth work experience, internships, apprenticeships, on-the-job training (OJT), and hands-on learning.**

**Review strategies to respond to high unemployment.** America is facing a serious economic downturn, and DOL must be prepared to respond quickly in the event that unemployment continues to rise sharply. One tool that has been used in the past to help jobless workers is public service employment. DOL should review lessons learned from programs such as the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which funded public service employment, in order to identify best practices, and prepare proposals for a 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs program, should it become necessary.

For more information on these proposals please see, *Recover, Renew, Rebuild: Workforce Policies for a Strong and Fair Economy*: [http://www.clasp.org/publications/workforce2009\\_nov12\\_2008.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/publications/workforce2009_nov12_2008.pdf).