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111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 175

To evaluate certain skills certification programs, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JANUARY 8, 2009

Mr. FEINGOLD introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

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A BILL

To evaluate certain skills certification programs, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Skills Standards Certification Evaluation Act of 2009''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) Various entities across the United States have generated skills certification programs based on local and regional needs. At the same time, some national groups have engaged in similar efforts.

(2) As State and local workforce investment boards, workers, and employers search for a meaningful way to categorize skills, information about existing skills certification programs and certifications can be limited, and may lead to the development of new, duplicative certifications.

(3) As these skill certification programs may take less time than technical or vocational degrees, the programs provide important recognition for both employers and employees.

(4) Nationally available, recognized standards for skills certification allow employers and employees the greatest possible flexibility by making the certification portable and meaningful.

(5) These standards benefit both incumbent, highly skilled workers and those workers with less specialized skills or just starting in the workforce.

(6) Widely recognized standards for skills certification provide States, regions, communities, and cities the option and ability to quantify and categorize their workforce in a meaningful way.

(7) There is a well-documented ''skills gap'' in many industries, including manufacturing, that makes it difficult for employers to find workers.

(8) In 2005, 90 percent of manufacturing employers say a shortage of qualified production workers is their top workforce issue.

SEC. 3. PURPOSES.

The purposes of this Act are—

(1) to periodically evaluate skills certification programs that certify various employee skills and to determine which skills certifications are most desired by employers and employees; and

(2) to make information, and materials if possible, about skills certification programs available to eligible entities providing job training.

SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) LOCAL BOARD.—The term ''local board'' means a local workforce investment board established under section 117 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2832).

(2) SKILLS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM.—The term ''skills certification program'' means an industry-led or industry-created program that—

(A) receives Federal funding;

(B) is in existence as of the time that the evaluation under section 5 is conducted;

(C) delineates a skill set necessary for a career in a certain industry;

(D) is not associated with an associate, baccalaureate, or postbaccalaureate degree program, and does not culminate in such a degree; and

(E) is portable or widely or nationally recognized.

(3) STATE BOARD.—The term ''State board'' means a State workforce investment board established under section 111 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 2821).

SEC. 5. EVALUATION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Secretary of Education, in consultation with each other, shall—

(1) conduct an evaluation of skills certification programs;

(2)(A) determine best practices models for skills certification programs; or

(B) rank the skills certification programs available in an industry, based on the evaluation criteria described in subsection (b); and

(3) make recommendations on—

(A) the merits of a unified national approach to programs of skills certification, as compared to multiple regional and local skills certification programs; and

(B) ways to streamline, if possible, duplicative and similar skills certification programs into a single, widely recognized certification.

(b) CRITERIA FOR EVALUATIONS.—The evaluation of the skills certification programs conducted under subsection (a)(1) shall include the following criteria:

(1) Overall usefulness of the skills certification program for workers and employers.

(2) The demand from industry for workers with the skills provided and certified through the skills certification program.

(3) Industry involvement in the development of the skill standards included in the skills certification program.

(4) Industry recognition of the certification awarded under the skills certification program.

(5) The success of the skills certification program, based on criteria including—

(A) how many individuals have successfully completed the skills certification program;

(B) how many of such individuals are employed in a field utilizing the skills provided and certified through the skills certification program; and

(C) the length of time that such individuals have been so employed.

(6) The level of recognition of the skills certification program as of the time of the evaluation, including an assessment of—

(A) how widespread the skills certification program is used;

(B) the number of entities, including State boards, local boards, and institutions of higher education, that have used the skills certification program;

(C) the number of States in which the certification is recognized; and

(D) whether the skills provided and certified through the skills certification program are reasonably useful.

(7) Cooperative creation in the development of the skills certification program, such as whether the standards of the skills certification program were created in consultation with relevant partners, including business, labor, and community organiza-

tions, and whether such partners still support and use the standards.

(8) The ease of sharing the skills certification program, including how portable the materials are, how versatile the materials are, and whether the certification programs requires the educator to have access to specific or extensive materials or equipment not usually found in a classroom.

(c) OUTREACH.—Not later than 60 days after the evaluation described in subsection (a) has been completed, the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Labor, and the Secretary of Education, in consultation with each other, shall—

(1) post the results of the evaluation, the ranking of skills certification programs or the best practices of such programs, and the recommendations, as described in subsection (a), on the Internet; and

(2) make the information described in paragraph (1) available in print form to Congress and to interested parties, including—

(A) technical colleges;

(B) community colleges;

(C) State boards and local boards;

(D) community organizations; and

(E) other groups providing worker training, in partnership and cooperation with industry.

(d) UPDATES.—The Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Labor, and the Secretary of Education, in consultation with each other, shall continue to update the evaluations, the rankings of skills certification programs or best practices of such programs, and the recommendations, as described in subsection (a), as appropriate, but not less often than once every 2 years.

(e) FUNDING.—Of the amounts appropriated to, and available at the discretion of, the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Labor, and the Secretary of Education for programmatic and administrative expenditures, such sums as may be necessary shall be used to establish and carry out the requirements of this Act.

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