

Durbin, Warnock, Bustos Introduce Bill To Invest In American Workforce

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Raphael Warnock (D-GA), along with U.S. Representative Cheri Bustos (D-IL-17), today introduced bicameral legislation that increases federal investments in worker training and helps prepare workers for the jobs of the future. The *Investing in Tomorrow's Workforce Act* would ensure that American workers have the skills needed to successfully navigate the transition into higher-skilled positions and in-demand industries. It has been estimated that nearly 50 percent of jobs in the United States could be at risk due to automation. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these trends, with one recent study by the World Economic Forum (WEF) indicating that 43 percent of businesses anticipate reducing their workforce due to increased technology integration.

“Preparing American workers for the future will strengthen the middle class and reaffirm our standing as an innovative global economic power,” Durbin said. “An investment in America’s workforce is an investment in our economy, and I’m proud to introduce this bill with Senator Warnock and Congresswoman Bustos.”

“Diversifying, expanding and strengthening our workforce is essential to keeping Georgia’s economy moving forward and to our nation’s continued economic development. When we support our workers through training to keep them competitive, we help Georgians, and Americans, hold on to good-paying jobs and build stability for future generations. I am proud to work with Senator Durbin and Representative Bustos to make this legislation law, and will continue working to invest in professional development for our workforce and protect the dignity of work for every worker,” said Warnock.

“Strengthening and growing our workforce has always been one of my top priorities,” Bustos said. “As we face the challenges of automation and other technological advancement, it’s critical we support in Illinois workers and ensure they are ready for the future. That’s why I’m pleased to join Senators Durbin and Warnock to introduce this critical bill to invest in the skills and resources our workers need to remain competitive.”

The WEF report also indicated that approximately 40 percent of current workers will require reskilling as a result of future automation. An International Monetary Fund report found that previous pandemic events have accelerated automation, and that economies with higher robot density see a larger increase in inequality in the medium term. Jobs that are most affected by automation are those held predominantly by groups that are already vulnerable, such as low-income earners and people of color.

However, investments in the training needed to transition workers into these new opportunities are at historic lows. The United States spent just 0.1 percent of Global

Domestic Product (GDP) on active labor market policies in 2015—significantly less than many European countries and less than half of the level of workforce investments made in the United States in 1985 as a share of GDP.

A 2017 study from Ball State University estimated that, broken down by county, between approximately 50 percent and 60 percent of the jobs in Illinois could be at risk of becoming automated.

“The past year has put our workforce system to the test, proving that the workforce development board network is effective, and now is the time to ensure the increased volume can be met. As the benefits and challenges of the future of work, including automation, fundamentally shift our workforce, we need legislation like the Investing in Tomorrow’s Workforce Act to assist individuals at high risk for job loss. This essential legislation, which incorporates proven local resources like workforce development boards that support communities, builds on the efficiency and effectiveness of the workforce system. We commend Senator Durbin, Senator Warnock, and Senator Cortez Masto for their leadership and willingness to work with us to craft this proposal and urge their House and Senate colleagues to move swiftly to enact this needed bill,” said Ron Painter, President and CEO, National Association of Workforce Boards

Specifically, the *Investing in Tomorrow’s Workforce Act* would:

- *Invest in Workforce Training.* The bill would create a grant program through the Department of Labor to support industry partnerships in developing and carrying out training programs for workers who are, or are likely to become, dislocated because of advances in technology, including automation.
- *Expand Current Programs.* The bill would increase funding for National Dislocated Worker Grants and amend the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to ensure workers who are dislocated by automation are included in WIOA programs.

Along with Durbin and Warnock, the legislation is also cosponsored by U.S. Senator Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV).

The *Investing in Tomorrow’s Workforce Act* is supported by the following organizations: the National Skills Coalition; the National Association of Workforce Boards; and the Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center