

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 22, 2015

The Honorable Tom Perez
Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I write to express my support for funding from the Department of Labor to support the Missouri Division of Workforce Development proposal for the Career Pathways Bridge.

The crisis in Ferguson, Missouri last year brought national attention to St. Louis County and City. Though the larger region is home to Fortune 500 companies and prominent universities, there are also pockets of St. Louis City and North St. Louis County known for widespread poverty, high unemployment, and failing schools. In these severely depressed regions of St. Louis County, more than one-quarter of young adults between the ages of 16 to 29 are unemployed. Many of these young people have never once held a steady job or gained work experience from earning the minimum wage.

The application to the Department of Labor from the Missouri Division of Workforce Development proposes a new program to focus on preparing individuals for employment who have never had opportunities in the workplace. The proposal recognizes that individuals who have never worked are often denied any opportunity to learn basic employment skills. Existing job training programs focus on those training for technical careers, or those who are changing careers, but these programs are insufficient for this one targeted group. The Missouri Division of Workforce Development has outlined the St. Louis Career Pathways Bridge, a program targeted at these frequently overlooked individuals who lack all workplace skills.

The Career Pathways Bridge is designed to focus on those who need intensive training to develop basic skills that will allow them to succeed at work. Career Pathways Bridge will be able to reach deep into these communities through outreach programs and satellite offices to find participants in North St. Louis County and St. Louis City. With intensive development for small groups, including soft skill development, behavioral counseling, and long-term job coaches, this job training program is uniquely crafted for an often underserved population.

There is strong support in the region to ensure long-term success for the Career Pathways Bridge. Numerous partners will lend their networks and expertise to the program. For example, St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, which is the economic development agency for both St. Louis City and St. Louis County, has already pledged to lead the program's collaboration effort with the St. Louis business community. Also, local workforce investment boards in St. Louis County and St. Louis City will deploy their network of business executives and community leaders to monitor the Career Pathway Bridge and help the program achieve its goals. There is a long list of other collaborating partners, each with regional experience that will benefit both the Career Pathways Bridge, and the participants.

Over time and with the combined support of our government, various community partners, and area residents, the Career Pathways Bridge will help some of St. Louis's most vulnerable citizens gain a crucial foothold on the "Ladder of Opportunity." Therefore, I respectfully request that you give this application all due favorable consideration in accordance with all applicable rules and guidelines.

I appreciate your attention to this application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Claire McCaskill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Claire" starting with a large loop and the last name "McCaskill" ending with a double loop.

Claire McCaskill
United States Senator