



July 9, 2024

The Honorable Jason Smith
Chairman
House Committee on Ways and Means
1139 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Neal
Ranking Member
House Committee on Ways and Means
1129 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Neal:

The Exhibitions & Conferences Alliance (ECA), a coalition of the leading professional, trade, and labor organizations from across the business events industry, strongly supports Section 3 of H.R.8915, the *Education and Workforce Freedom Act*.

In 2024, the business events industry will employ 2.6 million Americans and drive \$399 billion in spending across the United States¹. Business events—including trade shows, conferences, meetings, and expositions—attract exhibitors, attendees, and buyers from around the world to share knowledge and conduct business here in the United States. These events drive demand for restaurants, hotels, travel services, and Main Street commerce in cities and towns throughout Southeast and South Central Missouri, Western Massachusetts, and all 50 states.

Our industry relies on a highly skilled workforce to deliver the business events that help drive domestic economic growth, support job creation, and empower small businesses from coast to coast. Given the nationwide scope of our industry, our future success is dependent on equipping *all* Americans with the education, skills, and training necessary to advance their careers and grow our important sector of the U.S. economy.

That's why ECA enthusiastically supports Section 3 of H.R.8915, the *Education and Workforce Freedom Act*. These important provisions would expand qualified expenses under Section 529 savings plans to include postsecondary training and credentialing, such as licenses and professional (non-governmental) certifications.

By covering tuition, exam, and training costs associated with obtaining workforce certifications and licenses, ECA believes that this legislation would transform 529 plans from college savings plans into *career* savings plans, including for those who will not be pursuing a college degree, and help workers secure in-demand, good-paying jobs like those that our industry offers. This is particularly important for Americans without a four-year college degree, many of whom comprise the backbone of our industry and enjoy strong middle-class careers.

Throughout the business events industry, there is ample evidence that postsecondary credentials lead to increased worker earnings. Here are just two examples from ECA alliance partners:

¹ Events Industry Council, *Global Economic Significance of Business Events* (2023).

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- The International Association of Exhibitions & Events (IAEE) finds that event professionals holding their Certified in Exhibition Management (CEM) designation earn 30% more than those without a CEM².
- The Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) finds that event planners with their Digital Event Strategist (DES) certification earn 15% more than their colleagues without the certification³.

Moreover, with the Joint Committee on Taxation previously scoring H.R.1477, the *Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act* (which Section 3 is derived from) at only \$85 million over ten years, Section 3 of the *Education and Workforce Freedom Act* represents a relatively small investment that will help attract, train, and grow the next-generation skilled workforce in our country for many years to come.

If you have any questions, or if ECA can provide either of you with additional information and perspective on these important provisions, please contact me by phone at (703) 672-0780 or via email at tommy.goodwin@exhibitionsconferencesalliance.org. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,



Thomas F. (Tommy) Goodwin, FASAE, CAE, PMP, CMP
Vice President

² International Association of Exhibitions & Events, *Skills Matrix and Job Description: Executive Summary* (2023).

³ Magdalina Atanassova and Michelle Russell, "Highs and Lows: 2023 Salary Survey," *Convene Magazine* (Professional Convention Management Association), December 2023.