

May 30, 2019

Job Corps Program: Plans to Close and Restructure Civilian Conservation Centers (CCCs)

Background

Job Corps is administered by the Office of Job Corps in the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL's) Employment and Training Administration (ETA). The program consists primarily of 123 residential centers throughout the country that provide academic and employment training to disadvantaged youth ages 16 to 24. The program's purpose is to provide these youth with the skills needed to obtain and hold jobs in in-demand industries or the Armed Forces, or enroll in postsecondary education. In addition to receiving academic supports and workforce training, the program engages youth in other services to promote their overall well-being. The program was originally authorized under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-452) and was most recently reauthorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, P.L. 113-128). Job Corps operates on a program year (PY) basis, from July 1 through the following June 30. In PY2017, approximately 28,000 students were enrolled in the program.

WIOA directs DOL to select on a competitive basis an entity—"Federal, State, or local agency, an area career and technical education school, a residential career and technical education school, or a private organization"—to operate Job Corps centers (Section 147(a)). DOL may enter into agreements with Indian tribes to operate Job Corps centers for Indian youth (Section 147(e)).

Section 147(d) authorizes the DOL Secretary to enter into an agreement with the Secretary of Agriculture to operate Civilian Conservation Centers (CCCs) that are primarily in rural areas. The law specifies that such centers are to provide (in addition to academics and career and technical education training) "programs of work experience to conserve, develop, or manage public natural resources or public recreational areas or to develop community projects in the public interest." Further, enrollees in CCCs may provide assistance in addressing national, state, and local disasters, consistent with child labor laws and regulations. In such instances, USDA must ensure that "enrollees are properly trained, equipped, supervised, and dispatched consistent with standards for the conservation and rehabilitation of wildlife established under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act."

Job Corps centers are currently operated by a variety of entities. Of the 123 centers, 24 are CCCs that are operated by the U.S. Forest Service, an agency within USDA. DOL transfers funding for these centers to USDA under an interagency agreement that has been in place since 2008. The remaining 99 centers are operated by private entities, most of which are for-profit organizations.

Plans for Civilian Conservation Centers

DOL announced plans to close 9 CCCs and restructure the remaining 15 CCCs (see **Table 1**) via a May 24, 2019, press release and a May 30, 2019, *Federal Register* notice. Under this plan, DOL intends to discontinue the role of the Forest Service in operating the CCCs and for DOL to operate these centers under contracts or via partnerships. The notice specified that—as articulated by USDA—terminating the role of CCCs would "allow the Forest Service to prioritize its core natural resource mission to improve the condition and resilience of the nation's forests." The notice indicates that each CCC would "transition out, or be on an established plan to transition out," of the Job Corps program by September 30, 2019. The notice also stated that DOL relies on the closure criteria of "program reform and streamlining operations" as the basis for the closure (see subsequent discussion in the next section). News outlets report that more than 4,000 students will be affected and that approximately 1,100 Forest Service employees may lose their jobs.

Table 1. Status of CCCs

CCCs to be Closed	CCCs to be Restructured
Anaconda (MT), Blackwell (WI), Cass (AR), Flatwoods (VA), Fort Simcoe (WA), Frenchburg (KY), Oconaluftee (NC), Pine Knot (KY), Timber Lake (OR)	Angell (OR), Boxelder (SD), Collbran (CO), Columbia Basin (WA), Curlew (WA), Great Onyx (KY), Harpers Ferry (WV), Lyndon B. Johnson (NC), Jacobs Creek (TN), Mingo (MO), Pine Ridge (NE), Schenck (NC), Trapper Creek (MT), Weber Basin (UT), Wolf Creek (OR)

Source: DOL, press release, May 24, 2019.

Note: DOL has recently entered into a grant agreement with the Idaho Department of Labor to operate the Centennial CCC (ID).

Job Corps Closure Provisions

Two sections in WIOA address closures of Job Corps centers. Section 159(j) specifies that prior to the closure of any Job Corps center, DOL must ensure (1) that the proposed decision to close the center is publicly announced in the *Federal Register* or other appropriate means; (2) that a reasonable comment period, not to exceed 30 days, is established for interested individuals to submit written comments to the DOL Secretary; and (3) that the Member of Congress who represents the district in which a center is located is notified within a reasonable period of time in advance of any final decision to close the center.

Separately, Section 161(c) of WIOA required DOL to

submit, by December 31, 2014, to four congressional committees written criteria that the DOL Secretary will use to determine when a Job Corps center is to be closed and how to carry out such closure. In December 2014, DOL submitted a report to the committees that described the steps it had taken to date to establish a closure methodology via the *Federal Register*. With regard to CCCs, the report additionally stated that low-performing CCCs could be closed as a result of the closure methodology process or based on decisions made jointly by the DOL and USDA Secretaries.

Closure Criteria

DOL has published notice about the closure criteria, and changes to those criteria, in multiple *Federal Register* notices between January 2013 and May 2019. The four main closure criteria are outlined below. As specified in the May 30, 2019, *Federal Register* notice, a closure may be based on any one of the four criteria, even if a center qualifies for closure under more than one criterion.

- *Program Reform and Streamlining Operations*: This refers to efforts to close a center or group of centers to advance the overall management and operation of Job Corps. This criterion closes centers for the purpose of focusing program resources on higher performing centers and improving student access to these centers, increasing cost efficiency, and enhancing the geographic match between student demand for the program and availability of centers. DOL is using this criteria as the basis for closing the nine CCCs.
- *Performance Over Time*: This criterion relies on three factors to determine whether to close a center: (1) the overall performance of the center, based on the Outcome Measurement System (OMS) Center Report Card (as described in the next section); (2) on-board strength (OBS), or a rating that demonstrates the extent to which a center operates at full capacity in terms of student enrollment; and (3) the facility condition index (FCI), which refers to the condition of residential and learning facilities at these centers. DOL is to give centers a rating based on data over five program years. DOL used this rating system as the justification for closing the Treasure Lake CCC (OK) in 2014, Ouachita CCC (AR) in 2016, and the Golconda CCC (IL) in 2018.
- *Joint Decision of the DOL and USDA Secretaries to Close a CCC*: A joint decision by the Secretaries to close a CCC must take into account past efforts to improve the center's deficiencies, the prospect for improving those deficiencies, the impact on the mission and workforce of both departments, and the purpose and goals of the Job Corps program. This criterion does not limit the DOL's authority to propose closing a CCC based on other closure criteria, regardless of whether the Secretaries jointly agree to close it.
- *Evaluation of Effort*: This refers to closure based on an evaluation of the effort required to provide a high-quality education and training at the center, and not for reasons related to chronic low performance or agreement of the Secretaries. Other reasons could include the condition of the facility and the impact of one-time events. DOL used this rationale to close the

Golconda Job Corps center (FL) in 2017, citing several factors related to safety and design challenges at it.

Program Performance

The May 30, 2019, *Federal Register* notice does not describe any data collection efforts that informed the closure criteria of "program reform and streamlining operations." However, the press release noted that DOL "reviewed the CCCs performance and outcome measurements, internal controls, capacity and proximity, costs, and ongoing needs of each CCC" relative to the overall program. The press release also stated that discontinuing USDA's role would serve a greater number of students at higher-performing centers at a lower cost. WIOA, its accompanying regulations, and the Job Corps Policy and Requirements Handbook (PRH) outline how DOL is to evaluate program performance.

Section 159(c) of WIOA directs DOL to establish expected levels of performance for the program and individual centers that are related to the six primary indicators of performance under Section 116 of the law. These indicators address entry into education; training or unsubsidized employment; median earnings; obtaining a recognized postsecondary credential or secondary school diploma; participating in an education or training program that leads to a credential or employment; and program effectiveness in serving employers. According to the most recent version of the PRH, DOL has not fully implemented these performance indicators for Job Corps. DOL instead uses what is known as the OMS Center Report Card to evaluate performance of each center across multiple indicators (related to school and employment) and to rank the centers.

Section 159(f) of WIOA specifies that DOL must conduct an annual assessment of the performance of each center. Further, if a center fails to meet the six primary indicators of performance (or other expected levels of performance), the DOL Secretary must develop and implement a performance improvement plan (PIP) or similar plan over a one-year period to improve center performance. If a CCC fails to improve on measures of performance within three years, DOL, in consultation with USDA, shall select an entity to operate the CCC on a competitive basis.

The regulations (20 C.F.R. §686.1070) further expand on when DOL will use PIPs. A center is considered as failing, and therefore eligible for a PIP, based on whether DOL has implemented the WIOA performance measures. If these measures have not been implemented, a center is considered failing if it is ranked in the lowest 10% of centers for the most recent program year *and* it has a report card score of 88% or less of the national average of all scores. If the WIOA performance indicators have been implemented, the center is considered failing if it is ranked in the lowest 10% of centers for the most recent program year and it fails to achieve an average of 90% on the expected level of performance for all of the primary indicators.

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