



# Oregon

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March 2, 2021



The Honorable Earl Blumenauer  
Chair, Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee

The Honorable Vern Buchanan  
Ranking Member, Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee

RE: Oregon Trade Act Program, Oregon Employment Department

Written Testimony Supporting Reauthorization of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program

Subcommittee Chair Blumenauer, Ranking Member Buchanan, and members of the Committee, on behalf of the Oregon Employment Department (OED) Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program, I wish to thank you for the invitation to testify regarding reauthorization of the TAA Program. Across our nation, communities both rural and urban are built around specific industries—when foreign competition affects these industries, it is not just the individuals but the entire community that feels the effect. The Oregon Employment Department's Trade Act Program strongly supports reauthorization of the TAA Program, which would allow thousands of Americans laid off due to foreign trade to receive life-changing re-employment benefits and services and help re-stabilize the communities in which they live.

I request that this testimony be entered into the formal record.

### **Oregon TAA strongly supports reauthorization of the TAA Program**

#### *TAA Program overview*

The Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program is a federal entitlement program providing benefits and services to eligible U.S. workers whose jobs have been adversely impacted by foreign trade. TAA

Program benefits and services include:

- Case management services;
- Reemployment services;
- Job search allowances;
- Relocation allowances;
- Retraining benefits including classroom, on-the-job, or apprenticeship training;
- Wage subsidies for workers aged 50 and older;
- Health Coverage Tax Credit (HCTC); and
- Income support in the form of Trade Readjustment Allowances (TRA).

First enacted by the Trade Act of 1974, the Trade Act has been amended in 2002, 2009, 2011, 2015, and is scheduled for reauthorization during the summer of 2021.



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## *How the TAA Program uniquely benefits American workers*

The TAA Program provides participants opportunities for a stable career at a living wage. The goal and standard of the program is to re-employ workers at a wage that is at least 80% of their layoff employment (a participant's "suitable wage"), and in a field with a promising labor market forecast. The program offers paid-for training and mandates Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) co-enrollment, both of which provide the skills and benefits a customer needs in order to enter a new field when no jobs are available that match their skill set or are 80% of their previous wage. Each participant has a dedicated TAA staff person providing guidance and support from lay off identification through program exit, when the participant has found new employment.

According to the U.S. Employment and Training Administration-Department of Labor (ETA-DOL's) *Annual Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers Program Report for FY 2019*, most workers who qualify for the TAA Program are 50 years old or older and have been employed with their trade-qualifying employer or in the field related to their trade for the majority of their working life. The TAA Program offers wage subsidies for these trade-affected workers. Oregon TAA is finding that the trade-affected worker base continues to diversify. Workers may have limited English proficiency, are laid off from high-paying tech sector jobs, and an increasing percentage are women. Eligibility for training ranges from apprenticeship to a graduate degree, combined with personal case management, ensure TAA participants from all backgrounds have the tools to gain new skills and confidently re-enter the workforce.

## *Support of TAA Program reauthorization*

We understand the value of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act, and strongly supports reauthorization of this life-changing program. The TAA Program provides laid off Americans the skills to navigate new, long-term careers at a wage that is at least 80% of their trade-impacted employment. This is a program predicated on inclusion—trade-affected workers are typically older and the customer base continues to diversify. Reauthorizing the TAA Program supports the American dream of re-invention.

If the TAA Program is not reauthorized, thousands of laid-off workers will face an even greater struggle to find employment at a livable wage. Hard working, trade-affected workers and their families deserve re-skilling resources to re-enter the economy confidently and competitively, which the TAA Program uniquely provides.

I describe below the Oregon TAA Program operational model and best practices, followed by recommendations to make the reauthorization more beneficial to the TAA Program framework and trade-affected worker outcomes.

## **Oregon's TAA Program: A Success Story**

Oregon's TAA Program has been recognized for multiple best practices including:

- The number of workers served in relation to the state's total population;
- Program operational size;
- Efforts to innovate; and
- Uninterrupted delivery of services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because of these achievements, the U.S. Department of Labor (U.S. DOL) has provided Oregon multiple opportunities to present best practices to other TAA Programs. TAA Programs administered by other states have also visited or met with Oregon TAA to understand our operational model.

Oregon identified an opportunity for significant operational development of the program and as such:



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- Centralized the case management team;
- Created a dedicated local outreach and re-employment team, the Local TAA Navigators;
- Formalized the petition coordinator role; and
- Formed a central analyst team.

The program started using new technology, such as LinkedIn, to conduct outreach and re-employment, and engaged in pilots with high-tech vendors to test cutting-edge engagement methods. Oregon's TAA Program has been able to adapt during COVID-19 and serve a large customer base due to its virtual service delivery infrastructure, such as business intelligence tools, Zoom and Microsoft Teams, as well as a customized case management system. To comply with COVID-19 safety precautions, the 40 plus member Oregon TAA Team converted to a telework service delivery within one week of the pandemic, a model it has maintained since March 2020.

Oregon's TAA Program has been able to make these efficient, modernized operational changes due to continuous support from OED and U.S. DOL leadership, and flexibility of TAA grant case management fund guidance.

The Oregon TAA Program is uniquely situated to provide meaningful testimony to Congress due its experience delivering best practices and innovations through the TAA Program. Oregon's TAA Program has presented best practices in partnership with the U.S. DOL through Workforce GPS and directly to other states administering the TAA Program. Listed below are Oregon's TAA Program best practices:

- Petition Coordinator role;
- "Think Differently" TAA Program referral form;
- Utilization of Oregon's Unemployment Insurance (UI) data via a Business Intelligence tool to identify laid off workers and trade impact on new worker groups;
- Centralized case management unit;
- Local Trade Act Navigator role;
- Outreach to affected workers and number of affected workers served;
- TAA Central Analyst Team;
- Apprenticeship training support and approval; and
- Effective service delivery during COVID-19.

Oregon's TAA Program strategic successes are founded on serving customers by leveraging new technology and data-driven decision making, and collaborating with partners to cement best practices within an efficient business model. Here are a few examples:

- Oregon's TAA Program partnered with a vendor, Mathematica, to conduct a behavioral project evaluating effectiveness of alternative request for worker list letters, and potential benefit and service eligibility notifications. This study clarified best practices surrounding customer engagement that are transferable to other TAA Programs.
- Oregon's TAA Case Management Unit developed Spanish Case Management Training and delivered the training via webinar to TAA Puerto Rico, per the request of the U.S. DOL
- Oregon's TAA Program partnered with OED's Workforce Operations Regional Business Services team for a one-year pilot program with LinkedIn. Five hundred premium account vouchers are available to TAA participants to help maximize their job search. Services include tailored, live webinars, direct communication to company recruiters, and ability to track when participants find new work. TAA staff use LinkedIn features to promote on-the-job training opportunities, job fairs, and hiring opportunities in collaboration with partners.



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- The TAA Petition Coordinator has been researching new methods to identify non-COVID-19 related layoffs. The Coordinator runs business intelligence (BI) reports for worker groups, contacts select company officials, and runs BI reports to add workers to existing petitions. TAA analyst staff are expanding business intelligence capacity by evaluating the user-friendly data visualization tool, Tableau.
- Cognizant of social distancing and service delivery, TAA staff pre-recorded a video of a Trade Act Information Session (TAIS). The web link to the video is included with their TAIS notice of company certification. This invitation to view the video is followed by outreach calls to connect and encourage participants to watch the TAIS and Rapid Response videos. TAA case managers, during the initial assessment, confirm that the customer watched both videos. Oregon's TAA Program is working on technology and service solutions that offer a live, virtual TAIS to customers.
- Case management services have been fully modified for virtual delivery. Participants are unable to access fax and printing services that field offices were providing before COVID-19. This has prompted TAA to offer electronic signature through a secure e-signature process. TAA Case Managers use Teams, Zoom, PE Client Softphones through their laptops, Adobe Pro and Sign, email, mail, and upload documents to the case management system. Participants send documents to Case Managers via email and smartphone scan apps. The TAA Case Manager Team incorporated a Case Management Dashboard into the TAA management information system (MIS). The dashboard enhances regular communication with participants by making it easier to track the status of the participants each case manager supports.

## **Oregon TAA Program Business Model**

### *Structured organizational model supported by funding flexibility*

The Oregon TAA Program is organized into teams with defined roles and responsibilities based on the DOL-mandated benefits, services, and administrative criteria necessary for operating the program. A team organized by function is more efficient than one in which individuals do unrelated activities requiring many different skills. This model has improved the consistency of our service delivery, the quality of our data, and enhanced service for our customers and their overall compliance with the program. The teams consist of the Central Case Management Unit, Local Trade Act Navigators, Petition Coordinator, TAA Analyst Team, and a Program Manager, the latter of whom leads the total TAA Team. The TAA Team also plans to add a TAA Program trainer, an IT expert, and a new TAA Analyst member.

### **CENTRAL CASE MANAGEMENT UNIT**

The Central Case Management Unit is the TAA Team's component of case managers, two lead workers, and two supervisors. Case managers complete the Initial Assessment to assess employment options available at a suitable wage, assist with job search and identify any gaps in skills through a comprehensive assessment, assist the worker with training options when needed, and support the participant through graduation if no suitable employment is available. The team works in the same physical office, however, they have currently transitioned to telework to support COVID-19 precautions.

This centralized organizational model creates a team environment in which staff become experienced serving customers from varied regions and backgrounds. The model has led to an increase in consistency of service delivery, knowledgeable and skilled staff, and the ability to serve large numbers of affected workers no matter where the layoff occurs within the state. In the past, Oregon tried a model with a case manager in each local area but we found that this model did not work well for serving a large worker group and created a workload challenge. Oregon also experienced circumstances historically when trade activity levels dropped in certain areas of the state while case managers were spread out and we found



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that members of our team lost program knowledge, and struggled to provide service and meet program compliance requirements as a result. Oregon concluded that centralizing the case management team and having them managed by TAA Supervisors/Program Managers allowed for more timely training and adjustments to service and program performance. Oregon TAA strongly recommends centralizing staff who conduct the same work when possible.

## LOCAL TRADE ACT NAVIGATORS

Oregon's TAA Program has at least one local TAA Navigator in each of Oregon's nine workforce areas. As a member of the local Rapid Response team, they live and work within the area and assist Oregon's TAA Petition Coordinator in identifying potential layoffs that may be Trade connected. The Navigators perform outreach to workers for benefit notification, facilitate TAIS to certified worker groups, and assist with navigating workers to services within the American Job Center (AJC) programs. TAA Navigators work with employers for job development, and on-the-job training opportunities for Trade-affected workers. We have found that the TAA Navigators working with our local AJCs ensure the centralized case management team has the local services and partner connections for co-enrollment building a customer-focused service delivery.

Additionally, we found that forming a TAA staff team with one of their roles dedicated to outreach has enabled Oregon to have the largest trade-affected worker customer base in the nation, with respect to the population of the state. We focused our investment in strategic outreach to be essential to moving eligible workers into the TAA Program and helping them to secure suitable employment upon exit from the program.

## PETITION COORDINATOR

The TAA Petition Coordinator identifies potential trade-related layoffs. The coordinator researches the layoff and if a potential Trade connection is identified the Petition Coordinator assists the local area to file, or files the petition directly with the U.S. DOL Employment and Training Administration Office of Trade Act Adjustment (U.S. DOLETA OTAA) and provides supporting documentation. The OTAA Investigator carefully reviews petition information and then issues a determination of whether the worker group is certified as trade-affected. Certification means that each worker listed under that petition is a trade-affected worker, and thus potentially eligible for TAA Program benefits and services.

Comparative to the navigator role, having a staff person specifically dedicated to identifying trade-related layoffs has resulted in Oregon's TAA Program having the largest number of pending petitions in the country, each petition covering a few to several thousand trade-affected Oregonians. As mentioned previously, investing in specific staff for identification of trade and outreach drastically increases the trade-affected worker customer base and outcomes.

## TAA ANALYST TEAM

The TAA Analyst Team is composed of the TAA Petition Coordinator, TAA Liaison, Business Analyst, and Data and Policy Analyst. This team is dedicated to maintaining the systems necessary to support TAA Program operations. Duties include the TAA Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) performance report, TAA participant file auditing, liaison to Oregon's 17 Community Colleges and Apprenticeship programs, building data reports and dashboards, maintaining and upgrading the management information system (MIS) and other related TAA technological resources, policy and process creation, guidance analysis, and liaising with vendors, partners, other TAA Programs, and U.S. DOL.



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Oregon's TAA Program is able to support a large and growing customer base and maintain a seamless coordination between its staff teams due to forming an analyst team dedicated to strategic planning, data-driven decision-making, quality control, guidance compliance, and maintaining modernized, secure technological infrastructure.

### *Connection to the Oregon workforce system (American Job Center network)*

The Oregon TAA Program is an active and engaged collaborator with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners and American Job Center staff. Collaboration occurs in all stages of trade-affected worker service delivery, from Rapid Response through program exit.

A new strategy in the Oregon TAA program is having the TAA Petition Coordinator use a Business Intelligence (BI) report to identify new layoffs that may be trade connected and/or to identify additional layoffs of affected workers to active Oregon TAA petitions. The Petition Coordinator reviews this information during strategy meetings for each certified TAA petition that includes staff from Trade, Higher Education Coordinating Commission/Office of Workforce Investments (HECC/OWI), local service providers, and unemployment insurance. This new strategy runs parallel with the communication and partnership that already occurs within the Local Rapid Response team. Through identification at the local level, Worker Adjustment Retraining Notification (WARD) filed with state, or the New TAA BI tool, all partners are notified of any layoff in the state no matter who hears or identifies it first.

TAA Information Sessions review benefits and services of the TAA Program, TRA deadlines, as well as sector strategies and partner services available in local areas. A coordinated team of TAA, TRA/UI, Wagner-Peyser, and WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker (DW) program staff provide service, benefit information, and include any additional partner staff services the worker group may need. In 2019, TAA and TRA collaborated to redesign the TAIS content. The TAIS redesign promotes reemployment services engagement, incorporates up-to-date regional labor market data, and clarifies presentation of rules and eligibility details. Due to COVID-19, the TAIS is delivered to trade-affected workers in a YouTube video link, or offered in a live video conference if workers have access to technology.

TAA staff work closely with WIOA partners, such as Wagner-Peyser, Title I DW program providers, and Local Workforce Boards, to administer employment and training services to trade-affected workers. Oregon's TAA Program is collaborating with HECC/OWI, which provides technical support to the Local Workforce Boards who administer the Title I DW Program, and each of the nine local workforce areas to identify new opportunities for co-enrollment. Oregon TAA is also working with WIOA data analysts, and OED IT staff to receive more frequent and comprehensive co-enrollment data.

Oregon TAA has collaborated with other workforce programs to build data reports that track TAA participant status for SNAP, STEP, Veteran services, and MSFW designation in order to streamline service delivery.

For quarterly performance reporting and data validation, TAA coordinates with WIOA and Wagner-Peyser staff to share data element results, and use standardized reporting and vetting methodology.

### *Looking Ahead*

The Oregon TAA Program has been updating its service delivery model and information systems to align with the TAA Final Rule. The TAA Final Rule is new, sweeping TAA guidance published September 21, 2020. The TAA Final Rule provides more flexible training and assessment services, increases the number of trade-affected workers who engage with TAA, and technologically modernizes the program.



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Oregon's TAA Program plans to expand its virtual service delivery tools to reach more workers and strengthen connections between staff working remotely due to COVID-19 and the release of the TAA Final Rule. Oregon also anticipates a greater TAA Program presence in the community due to TAA Final Rule guidance mandating publishing notices of petition certifications in local newspapers, 100% co-enrollment requirements of eligible and interested trade-affected workers in the WIOA Dislocated Worker Program, and mandatory provision of Rapid Response services to trade-affected workers.

## **Oregon's best practices transferable to the greater TAA Program framework**

### *Optimized use of case management funds*

As noted earlier, Oregon's TAA Program successes are supported by optimizing TAA grant funds for positive customer outcomes. We use TAA grant case management funds for the TAA Local Navigators, non-PIRL-related data reporting, and projects that support case management services, such as the LinkedIn re-employment pilot. Strategic use of funding has allowed Oregon to grow its trade-affected worker customer base to one of the comparatively largest in the nation.

### *Virtual service delivery infrastructure*

Oregon's TAA Program has been able to provide not only unbroken service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, but has increased its outreach, services administered, and number of customers served in 2020. We accomplished this because it maintained the modernized technology critical to converting to teleworking/virtual service delivery. Examples include:

- Virtual communication tools such as Zoom, and Microsoft Teams;
- Ability to integrate new tools such as Tableau, LinkedIn, and YouTube;
- An IT team dedicated to supporting workforce programs and experienced in completing large technical projects;
- A centralized case management team already comfortable serving customers virtually; and
- Support for modernization and teleworking service delivery by OED's leadership team.

### *Direct, ongoing engagement with employers, partners, and other AJC programs*

The TAA Local Navigators, Case Managers, and TAA Analyst Team cement partner relationships so that customers can seamlessly transition across workforce programs and receive timely, targeted service delivery. Engagement examples include: regular, ongoing meetings; shared policies and processes; data connections contracts with training and employment vendors; and, using standardized U.S. DOL-mandated performance criteria across workforce programs to evaluate customer success.

### *Modernized outreach: Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube Rapid Response and TAIS videos*

Oregon TAA has been able to maintain and grow a large TAA customer base, even in times of COVID-19, due to leveraging modernized and popular methods of information delivery. Oregon TAA converted TAIS sessions, previously held in person, to video format so that customers could access them safely from home and at a time convenient for them. The Oregon Rapid Response Coordinator shared the Rapid Response video created by HECC/OWI with Oregon TAA so that Rapid Response could move to virtual service. Oregon TAA also uses methods to communicate with the public that are familiar to them: LinkedIn, social media, and local media outlets.

### *Optimized configuration of TAA staff*

A cost-effective way for the TAA Program to increase quality service delivery and customer outreach is to re-configure the organizational model of available staff.



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Oregon's TAA Program chooses the organizational model of each staff team based on the service delivered. Case management and analyst teams are centralized because it is critical for those team members to work together to deliver services and develop infrastructure, respectively. The Local Navigator model is the local connection: the employment services, appropriate partner services, and outreach Local TAA Navigators provide are dependent upon a deep knowledge and connection to a particular region.

Having staff dedicated to one particular area of work, such as case management, data analysis, outreach, petition research etc. allows staff to become experts in their work. The Oregon TAA Program strongly recommends organizing teams by function, situating duties using the same skills under one role.

## **Recommendations for Congressional reauthorization of the TAA Program**

### *1) Clarify TAA petition filing criteria to include 21<sup>st</sup> century technology impacts*

Petition filing currently covers employers that lay off their employees due to the affects from foreign competition, such as an employer outsourcing jobs to China. Oregon recommends expansion of petition-filing criteria to address job loss due to 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, such as foreign cyber-threats, automation, and artificial intelligence. In recent years, the Oregon TAA Program's Petition Coordinator, Navigators, and partners have encountered more frequent layoffs resulting from automation and technology displacement.

### *2) Encourage states administering the TAA Program to create a Petition Coordinator role*

Oregon's TAA Program created the Petition Coordinator role in 2018, formalizing the program's decade-long best practice of assigning a dedicated staff person to research trade-impacted layoffs and assist in filing petitions on behalf of Trade-affected workers. We found that dedicating a staff member specifically to assist in identifying trade-related layoffs has resulted in Oregon's TAA Program having the largest number of pending petitions in the country, each petition covering a few workers to several thousand trade-affected Oregonians. It made a difference in Oregon by investing in dedicated staff to look at the reasoning behind these layoffs increases the identification of worker groups impacted by foreign competition and provides them the resources needed to regain suitable employment.

An alternative to states creating the Petition Coordinator role is distributing the Petition Coordinator duties—researching layoffs, filing petitions etc.—among Local TAA Navigators.

### *3) Clarify how TAA grant case management funds can support optimal customer outcomes*

More explicitly state how case management funds can be used to optimize customer outcomes. Oregon has found that presenting these possibilities in a list, similar to how the U.S. DOL provides TAA guidance about the ways that administrative funds can be used. We also recommend including how new staff models can be charged to case management funds. For example, Oregon's TAA Program used case management monies to fund the navigator outreach role. This role aids us in educating employers and partners in identification of trade-affected worker groups leading to petition filing and Rapid Response. Other TAA Programs have reported to Oregon that they are struggling to get the navigator role approved by agency leadership. More explicitly stating in TAA law that new staffing models may be funded by case management monies would help states optimize their available staff.

In TAA guidance, case management grant monies have a 10% spending minimum and administrative monies have a 5% maximum.





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## **Closing remarks**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the TAA Program reauthorization, which if passed, will provide re-employment services to thousands of trade-affected workers creating stability for these workers and the communities in which they live. In collaboration with the U.S. DOL Office of Trade Adjustment Assistance and partner workforce programs, each state TAA Program works hard to ensure any worker whose job has been impacted by foreign competition have the opportunity to receive the assistance they are entitled to. In Oregon, we have witnessed what happens to our lumber communities when trade affects them, one of the many industries impacted in our state. We have also witnessed the hope and stabilization the TAA Program provides to these workers and their local economies. Congressional implementation of the Oregon TAA Program's reauthorization recommendation will give trade-affected workers their best chance of re-skilling and reinvigorating the economy, both local and nationally.

Accompanying this testimony is a PowerPoint presentation that we provided to the Ways and Means Subcommittee, NORPAC success story and a book of customer success stories submitted by Oregon TAA Program participants, demonstrating the impact the TAA Program has on the workers we serve.

## **If you have questions or feedback, please contact:**

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