After providing an all-time high of $24 billion in the late 1970s (in constant 2017 dollars), Congress has significantly reduced our nation’s investment in workforce training and employment services at the U.S. Department of Labor to about $5 billion a year today. These services can play a vital role in helping unemployed and low-income people move out of poverty and into better jobs with family sustaining wages. Yet these programs are currently not being funded even at the authorized levels specified in the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) that Congress passed in a nearly unanimous bipartisan vote.

From 1985 to 2000, funding for employment and training remained nearly constant, at around $7-8 billion per year (in 2017 dollars). By increasing nominal funding in 11 out of 15 years, Congress maintained level funding in real terms. Without nominal year-over-year increases, “flat funding” is actually a cut in real terms, as inflation and population growth combine to reduce the program’s ability to deliver equivalent services.
Since the early 2000s, employment and training programs have been cut significantly, from the steady $7-8 billion level to around $5 billion, where it has remained for a few years. Current funding levels are not sufficient to provide the employment and training services that individuals with barriers to employment need to move out of poverty and into good jobs.

Note: These data represent the Department of Labor’s (DOL) Employment and Training Administration’s (ETA) line item for “Employment and Training Services,” plus Job Corps. They do not include temporary funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).