



441 G St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

April 14, 2020

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
House of Representatives

Job Corps: DOL Should Provide Greater Transparency in Communicating Its Rationale for Closure Decisions

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Job Corps was created in 1964 and provides a comprehensive array of services to help low-income youth obtain the necessary skills to find a job, go to college, or enter military service.¹ Job Corps is administered by the Office of Job Corps under the Department of Labor's (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA). For fiscal year 2019, ETA was appropriated around \$1.7 billion in funding for the Job Corps program.² The program enrolls students at 118 centers located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.³ Ninety-four of the Job Corps centers are operated under DOL agreements with various service providers including businesses, Native American tribes, and nonprofit organizations. The remaining 24 centers, referred to as Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers (CCC), are operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service under an interagency agreement between USDA and DOL.⁴ The CCCs enrolled 3,512 students in program year 2018.

In late May 2019, DOL and USDA announced plans to transfer the management of all CCCs from the Forest Service to DOL. Under the plan, nine CCCs would permanently close and the

¹Job Corps was originally established by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Pub. L. No. 88-452, 78 Stat. 508. Job Corps was most recently reauthorized in 2014 by Title I, Subtitle C of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Pub. L. No. 113-128, 128 Stat. 1425, 1537 (2014) (codified at 29 U.S.C. § 3191 *et seq.*). In general, individuals must be age 16 to 21 at the time of enrollment to be eligible for the Job Corps program. While the law makes an exception to allow individuals who are ages 22 to 24 at the time of enrollment to participate in the program, their participation is limited to 20 percent of Job Corps overall participants. The age limits may be waived by DOL, in accordance with DOL regulations, for individuals with a disability. See 29 U.S.C. § 3194(a)(1).

²Congress appropriates funding for Job Corps on a fiscal year basis. However, Job Corps is operated on a program year basis, which runs from July 1 of a given year to June 30 of the following year. For example, program year 2018 ran from July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019.

³In program year 2018, the program enrolled approximately 50,000 students.

⁴Federal law states that Job Corps centers may include CCCs operated under an agreement between DOL and USDA. 29 U.S.C. § 3197(d). The number of CCCs reflects the number reported by DOL as of December 2019.

remaining CCCs would be operated by a contractor or partnership overseen by DOL.⁵ DOL officials said that the agency would have used its standard process for awarding contracts on a competitive basis for the remaining CCCs that were not selected for closure.⁶ The agencies have since withdrawn the proposal, and according to written responses from USDA, after conducting joint reviews of the CCCs, they decided that USDA will continue its involvement in the Job Corps program for the long-term.

You asked us to review the decision-making process that led to the May 2019 proposal to end the Forest Service's role in operating Job Corps centers. This report (1) describes the issues that prompted the decision to end USDA's role in the Job Corps program, and how members of the public, Congress, and Forest Service staff were notified of this decision; and (2) describes the factors considered in selecting centers for closure, and examines the effect that the announcement of proposed center closures had on Forest Service CCC recruitment and enrollment activities.

We reviewed documentation DOL used to support the proposal to close CCCs and transfer operations to DOL, including the supporting data and analysis, and interviewed DOL officials. We also interviewed USDA Forest Service officials and reviewed written responses that the Forest Service provided to our questions concerning the CCCs. To assess the reliability of the data DOL used to identify centers for closure, we (1) reviewed information about the data on students' access to Job Corps centers, center operational cost, and center performance and the system that produced them, including results from prior audits; and (2) collected information from DOL officials knowledgeable about the data. We similarly assessed the reliability of the data DOL used to track student recruitment. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of reporting information related to access, performance, cost, and student recruitment. We also reviewed relevant federal laws and DOL Federal Register notices related to Job Corps center closures. We compared DOL's actions to federal internal control standards related to using and communicating quality information.⁷

We conducted this performance audit from July 2019 to April 2020 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Eligibility and Program Services

To be eligible for Job Corps, youth must generally be age 16 to 24 at the time of enrollment; low-income; and experiencing one or more barriers to education and employment, such as

⁵Job Corps Center Proposal for Deactivation: Comments Requested, 84 Fed. Reg. 25,071 (May 30, 2019). DOL, ETA, U.S. Department of Labor Job Corps Announcement, (May 24, 2019). USDA Forest Service, *Leadership Corner - USDA transfers Forest Service Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers to DOL*, (May 24, 2019).

⁶For information on the contracting process, see GAO, Job Corps: Actions Needed to Improve Planning for Center Operation Contracts, [GAO-19-326](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 8, 2019).

⁷GAO, Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014).

being homeless, a school dropout, or in foster care. The majority of students live at Job Corps centers in a residential setting; other students commute on a daily basis from their homes to their respective centers. Job Corps generally provides students with meals, clothing, medical and dental care, academic instruction, and job training, among other things.

By law, the CCCs are expected to provide, among other things, “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.”⁸ According to Forest Service officials, 11 of the 24 CCCs offer vocational training in one or more of the following trades: carpentry, heavy equipment operation, and facility maintenance. In addition, all CCCs have firefighting programs allowing students the option to obtain firefighter credentials, according to Forest Service officials.

Job Corps Center Closure Decisions

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), DOL is required to establish criteria to use in its closure decisions⁹ and has used chronic low performance, among other criteria,¹⁰ to determine a center’s ability to provide students with a high-quality education and training.¹¹ DOL used the chronic low performance criterion to identify three CCCs for closure between 2014 and 2018: Treasure Lake (Oklahoma), Ouachita (Arkansas), and Golconda (Illinois).¹²

WIOA states that DOL, in consultation with USDA, can select another organization to operate a CCC when the CCC is performing poorly.¹³ Specifically, if a CCC fails to meet expected levels of performance or fails to improve performance after 3 program years, DOL, in consultation with USDA, can select an entity to operate the CCC on a competitive basis.¹⁴

In addition, WIOA sets forth certain requirements that must be met before Job Corps centers are closed. Specifically, DOL must ensure:

⁸29 U.S.C. § 3197(d)(1).

⁹29 U.S.C. § 3211(c).

¹⁰DOL defined chronically low-performing centers as centers that consistently lagged in overall performance during the past 5 consecutive program years without evidence of significant recent performance improvement. For example, DOL closed a center because it had the lowest performance ratings compared to all other centers over a 5-year period.

¹¹See Final Methodology for Selecting a Job Corps Center for Closure and Center Selected for Closure: Comments Request, 79 Fed. Reg. 51,198 (Aug. 27, 2014); Updated Methodology for Selecting a Job Corps Center for Closure and Center Selected for Closure: Comments Request, 81 Fed. Reg. 12,529 (Mar. 9, 2016).

¹² Treasure Lake CCC: 79 Fed. Reg. 51,198 (Aug. 27, 2014); and Final Notice of Job Corps Center for Closure, 79 Fed. Reg. 61,099 (Oct. 9, 2014). Ouachita CCC: 81 Fed. Reg. 12,529 (Mar. 9, 2016); and Final Notice of Job Corps Center for Closure, 81 Fed. Reg. 43,250 (July 1, 2016). Golconda CCC: Updated Methodology for Selecting a Job Corps Center for Closure and Center Proposed for Closure: Comments Requested, 82 Fed. Reg. 44,842 (Sept. 26, 2017). In April 2018, DOL announced via its website its final decision to close the Golconda Job Corps center. See DOL, ETA, <https://www.doleta.gov/Announcements/Closure-of-the-Golconda-Job-Corps-Center.cfm>.

¹³Examples of performance measures include the number of students that complete a career technical training program and attain either a high school diploma or high school equivalency, and job placement outcomes.

¹⁴29 U.S.C. § 3209(f)(4).

- (1) that the proposed closure decision is announced in advance to the general public in the Federal Register or other appropriate means;
- (2) the establishment of a reasonable comment period, not to exceed 30 days, for individuals to submit written comments; and
- (3) that the Member of Congress who represents the district in which the center is located is notified within a reasonable period of time in advance of any final decision to close the center.¹⁵

Prior Efforts to Transfer Operations of Forest Service Job Corps Centers

DOL proposed transferring the CCCs from USDA to DOL in its fiscal year 2019 and 2020 Congressional Budget Justifications and ultimately transferred one of the CCCs to a new operator. In its fiscal year 2019 and 2020 Congressional Budget Justifications, DOL proposed to end USDA's role in the program, thereby unifying responsibility for the Job Corps program under DOL. In 2019, DOL also transferred operational control of the Centennial CCC in Nampa, Idaho from the Forest Service to the Idaho Department of Labor and the College of Western Idaho, which was a new partnership.¹⁶

In its May 30, 2019 Federal Register Notice, DOL used a new criterion focused on reforming and streamlining operations to propose closing nine CCCs.¹⁷ The notice stated that DOL is engaged in an effort to reform and strengthen the overall management and operation of the Job Corps program. The notice also stated the closure of a center or group of centers may advance these efforts by 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 center availability.¹⁸ DOL requested public comments by July 1, 2019 on the proposal to close the CCCs, but not on the new criterion for selecting centers for closure. DOL subsequently withdrew the proposal on June 27, 2019, after members of Congress and others expressed concerns with closing the centers.

Misalignment of the Forest Service's Core Mission with the Job Corps Program Was Cited as a Key Decision Factor, and Some Notification about the Closure Plan Occurred

DOL and USDA officials cited misalignment of Forest Service's core agency mission with Job Corps' workforce development mission as a key factor that prompted the decision to transfer the

¹⁵29 U.S.C. § 3209(j).

¹⁶According to DOL officials, DOL's transfer of the Centennial center followed a demonstration project involving that center. The Idaho Department of Labor is a DOL grantee and will develop the Idaho Job Corps Program, to serve up to 50 residential and 250 non-residential students. The Idaho Department of Labor will also provide direct services to Job Corps eligible youth, including outreach, work-based learning, job placement, and supportive services. The agency's partner, the College of Western Idaho will assist in providing education and skills instruction.

¹⁷See Job Corps Center Proposal for Deactivation: Comments Requested, 84 Fed. Reg. 25,071 (May 30, 2019).

¹⁸According to USDA officials, the decision to end USDA's role in the Job Corps program would have resulted in a reduction of 1,058 Forest Service employees. USDA prepared general cost estimates for the drawdown of the centers, including costs related to personnel and closure of facilities. USDA estimated about \$70.4 million in costs to close nine CCCs and transition operation of the remaining CCCs to a contractor. USDA based their estimates on the actual costs associated with closing the Golconda, Ouachita, and Treasure Lake CCCs and transitioning the Centennial CCC to a new operator. This figure included personnel costs such as severance pay, lump sum leave payments, unemployment insurance, relocation costs, and facilities costs. GAO did not assess the reliability of these estimates.

USDA operated centers to DOL. According to DOL and USDA officials, the proposal to end USDA's role in the Job Corps program was first made in DOL's fiscal year 2019 and 2020 Congressional Budget Justifications. In a press release dated May 24, 2019, USDA stated one reason for the transfer was that the Jobs Corps mission directly aligns with DOL's core mission. Additionally, USDA sent DOL a letter dated May 24, 2019, stating the Forest Service would withdraw from operating the CCCs to focus on and prioritize its core natural resource mission—to improve the condition and resilience of the nation's forests.

According to USDA's written responses to our questions, the increased costs associated with fighting wildfires in recent years compelled the agency to reevaluate or review Forest Service operations and propose changes to refocus on its core mission. They also noted that the Forest Service-operated Job Corps centers are the only residential training programs USDA offers.

DOL notified some members of Congress with Job Corps centers affected by the proposed closures via email on May 24, 2019, the same day DOL and USDA publicly announced the plan to transfer USDA centers to DOL in press releases.¹⁹ According to Forest Service officials, CCC Directors were notified at their annual meeting in Denver, Colorado on the same day. Following the announcement to the CCC Directors, Forest Service officials stated that CCC Center Directors held an all-employee conference call for all Forest Service Job Corps employees to inform them of the proposed transfer and closure plan.

DOL Considered Three Factors in Selecting Centers for Closure; Student Enrollment at These Centers was Temporarily Suspended

DOL Considered Student Access, Performance, and Cost in Center Closure Selections, but Did Not Publicize the Selection Methodology

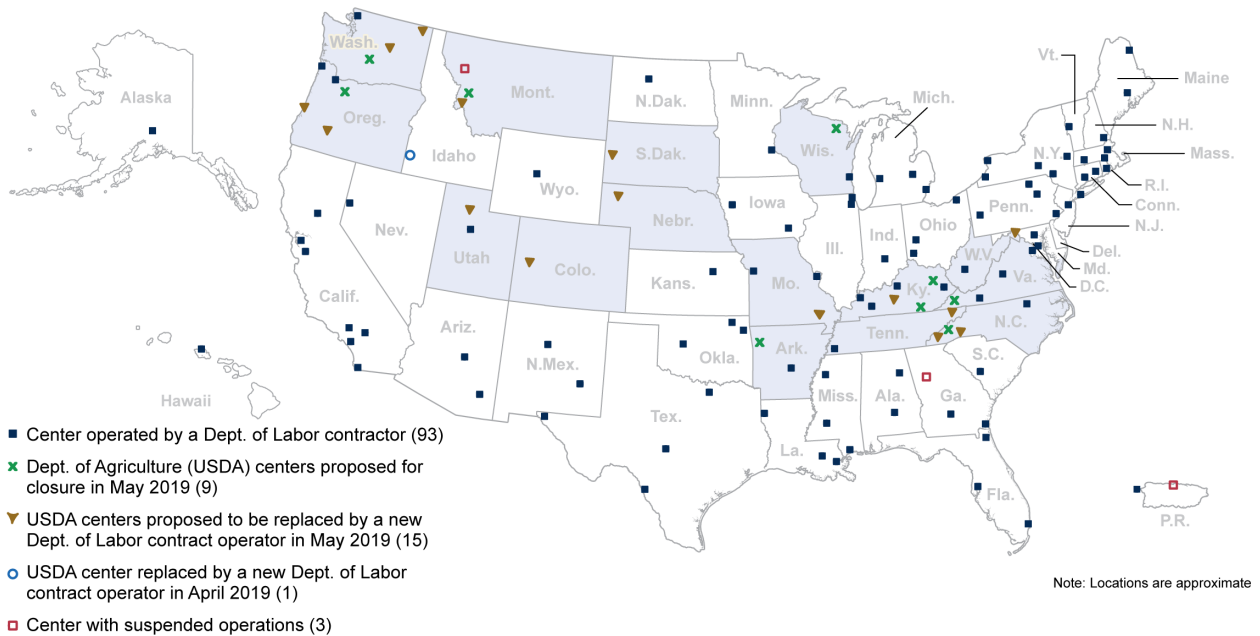
According to DOL documentation and our discussions with DOL officials, the agency considered student access to Job Corps Centers within their state of residence, center performance, and center cost in selecting nine of 24 Forest Service CCCs for closure, but information about the methods used to assess these factors was not included in its May 30, 2019 Federal Register Notice (see enclosure I for a list of the centers selected for closure or restructuring and key data DOL considered).

- **Student Access.** DOL considered the total number of centers operating in a state (see fig. 1) and in some cases, considered the percentage of in-state participants and the proximity of centers identified for closure to other centers, according to DOL officials and DOL documentation we reviewed. Centers were not considered for closure if there was only one operating in the state. DOL officials said they considered the percentage of in-state

¹⁹According to DOL officials, the WIOA Congressional notification requirement was not applicable at the time because the decision to close the centers was not yet final. WIOA states that relevant members must be notified "in advance of any final decision" to close centers. In this case, the proposal was eventually withdrawn, and so there was no final decision to close the centers. As a result, they said that there was no legal duty for them to notify Congress. DOL officials stated that they notified members as a courtesy.

participants because in-state student access is an important element in serving local at-risk youth as well as area employers.²⁰

Figure 1: Job Corps Center Locations as of December 2019



State where a USDA center was proposed for closure or replacement by a Dept. of Labor contractor in May 2019

Source: Employment and Training Administration (ETA) data; National Atlas (base map). | GAO-20-240R

- Performance.** DOL used a previously published method to identify chronically low-performing centers, according to DOL documentation we reviewed.²¹ The agency calculated a weighted 5-year average performance ranking using the most recently completed program years (2013-2017), where the more recent performance ranking received a greater weight than earlier years.²² DOL found that seven of the nine centers proposed for closure were ranked in the bottom half of all Job Corp centers. None of the CCCs had a low enough performance rating to require a performance improvement plan, according to DOL officials.²³

²⁰WIOA promotes enrollment of students that reside in the state or region where the Job Corps center is located. Specifically, WIOA directs DOL to establish targets for the percentage of enrollees that reside in the state and region in which the center is located as part of a plan for assigning students to Job Corps centers. 29 U.S.C. § 3195(c).

²¹For more information, see the method for assessing long-term performance described in the August 2014 and March 2016 Federal Register notices (cited previously).

²²DOL used the overall ranking of the center from the Outcome Measurement System Center Report Card 10-R. DOL determines each center's ranking based on how the centers perform in providing direct center services, initial career transition services, and long-term career transition services.

²³A performance improvement plan includes the actions the center must take to correct identified performance issues within a year of implementing the plan and the criteria that must be met for the center to complete the plan. To be placed on a performance improvement plan, the Job Corps center must be ranked in the bottom 10 percent of all centers for the preceding program year and have performance that is less than 88 percent of the national average, using the Job Corps Outcomes Measurement System data.

- **Cost.** DOL calculated the cost per student by dividing the cost of operating the center and providing services to the students by the number of student slots used for the 2018 program year, according to DOL documentation we reviewed. According to DOL officials, the costs to operate the centers are mostly fixed costs and the cost per student for running some of the centers is high because they serve relatively few students.

DOL did not publicize the specific methodology it used to determine which USDA centers to propose for closure in its May 30, 2019 Federal Register notice. In the May 30 notice, DOL stated that the proposed closure of the nine centers was based on the program reform and streamlining criterion, but did not provide the details of the methodology it used to propose centers for closure, such as how performance was calculated. Although DOL is not required to publicize its methodology in Federal Register notices, the agency had publicized the details of the criteria and methodology used in proposing to close other Job Corps centers. For example, in 2014, DOL proposed closing a center because it received the lowest rating across all of the centers and provided details on the factors considered and how performance was calculated.²⁴

Federal internal control standards direct agencies to communicate quality information externally.²⁵ While DOL may exercise flexibility in the factors it applies to select centers for closure, without communicating the details of the methodology, DOL might not ensure that, in accordance with federal internal control standards, the public and affected members of Congress are receiving sufficiently detailed information to understand why centers were selected for closure. Providing more information could help the public make more informed comments on the agency's proposal and would support Congress as it oversees the program.

Student Recruitment and Enrollment and Agency Hiring at Nine USDA Centers Were Temporarily Affected

In conjunction with the May 2019 announcement of the proposal to close nine USDA Job Corps centers, student recruitment and enrollment at the nine centers was suspended for about a month, according to Forest Service officials. DOL's Office of Job Corps was instructed to cease enrollment at the nine CCCs on May 24, 2019. In addition, the ETA Deputy Assistant Secretary notified USDA leadership that enrollment was suspended at the nine CCCs proposed for closure, but would continue at the other CCCs. According to written responses provided by Forest Service officials, the recruitment services contractors for the CCCs identified for closure immediately ceased providing student recruits following the closure announcement. Individuals expressing an interest in enrolling at the nine CCCs were provided information about other centers that could meet their educational and training needs, according to DOL officials. DOL authorized the resumption of student recruitment on June 23, 2019.

Our analysis of Job Corps' reports found that the number of students who attended the nine centers identified for closure declined during the time period that enrollment was suspended, with eight of the nine experiencing declines over 10 percent. However, since the withdrawal of the proposal, the nine CCCs proposed for closure have had 560 new student arrivals (from June 1, 2019 and November 6, 2019), according to data provided by the Forest Service.

The announcement also resulted in CCC staff searching for new positions and employee hiring

²⁴79 Fed. Reg. 51,198.

²⁵[GAO-14-704G](#). See Internal Controls 15.03.

was curtailed, which impacted student enrollment, according to data provided by the Forest Service. According to written responses from USDA, the CCCs also experienced staff attrition from May through October 2019.

According to DOL and Forest Service officials, efforts are underway to rebuild capacity and increase enrollment at the CCCs. The Forest Service launched a national hiring effort to obtain staff for the CCCs and developed a student recruitment plan. Forest Service officials said they are working closely with DOL and their recruitment services contractors to increase recruitment within the rural areas where the CCCs are located. The Forest Service is also developing its own CCC marketing program to attract more students from rural communities. Forest Service officials estimate that it will take approximately 9 months to attain stable recruitment and enrollment levels.

Conclusions

While DOL has the flexibility to propose closure of Job Corps centers for various reasons, the lack of specific information on the decision-making used to select centers for closure may have made it difficult for the public and members of Congress to understand the agency's May 2019 proposal. While the proposal was later withdrawn, more transparent information on future closure proposals could enhance oversight by Congress and public participation in the process. Transparent information is important for both the public and Congress to understand the agency's objectives and how the agency will continue to make Job Corps training accessible throughout the country.

Recommendation for Executive Action

The Assistant Secretary of DOL's Employment and Training Administration should include detailed information on the methodology used to identify centers for proposed closure in its notices for public comment.

Agency Comments

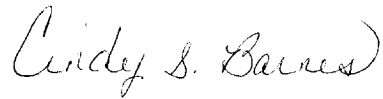
We provided a draft of this report to DOL and USDA for comment, and both agencies provided their written responses, which are reproduced in their entirety in enclosures II and III. USDA's Forest Service stated that it agreed with the contents of our draft report, but provided no comments on our recommendation since it was directed at DOL. DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) stated that it agreed with the purpose and intent of our recommendation to include detailed information on its methodology for proposing Job Corps centers for closure in its notices for public comment. However, it stated that the level of information it included in notices for public comment concerning such matters complied with WIOA requirements and provided a meaningful opportunity for public comment, and it did not indicate that it would provide more detailed information in the future. While we acknowledge that DOL is not required to publish its methodology in public notices, as we state in our report, we believe that including such information can provide greater transparency in assisting the public and the Congress in understanding the agency's decision-making used to select centers for closure. DOL included detailed information on the methodology used to identify centers for proposed closure in its 2014 and 2016 public notices. As such, we believe that ETA should take action to implement our recommendation in the event that the agency proposes Job Corps centers for closure in the future.

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We are sending copies of this report to the Secretaries of Labor and Agriculture and appropriate congressional committees. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or brownbarnesc@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in enclosure IV.

Sincerely yours,



Cindy Brown Barnes
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues

Enclosures – 4

Enclosure I: Factors Used by DOL to Select USDA Job Corps Centers for Closure and Restructuring

DOL Data Considered to Identify USDA Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers for Closure and Restructuring in May 2019

Civilian Conservation Center (CCC)	5-Year performance ranking (PY 2013-17) ^a	State	Number of Job Corps centers in state	Number of students the center is designed to serve	Number of students at the center on May 20, 2019	Cost per student slot utilized for PY ending March 31, 2019
Schenck	1	North Carolina	4	156	154	\$38,833
Trapper Creek	17	Montana	3	185	198	\$30,182
Wolf Creek	31	Oregon	6	213	193	\$32,637
Flatwoods	35	Virginia	3	105	82	\$85,542
Harpers Ferry	37	West Virginia	2	109	87	\$50,741
Curlew	48	Washington	4	138	129	\$40,489
Anaconda	49	Montana	3	170	153	\$35,821
Weber Basin	55	Utah	2	170	165	\$33,931
Angell	59	Oregon	6	160	105	\$42,949
Pine Knot	67	Kentucky	7	150	109	\$47,478
Pine Ridge	72	Nebraska	1	171	134	\$38,288
Frenchburg	74	Kentucky	7	100	61	\$66,422
Collbran	78	Colorado	1	190	179	\$29,013
Columbia Basin	80	Washington	4	236	226	\$32,679
Oconaluftee	81	North Carolina	4	110	95	\$46,335
Mingo	85	Missouri	3	144	90	\$51,793
Fort Simcoe	91	Washington	4	112	88	\$52,243
Blackwell	98	Wisconsin	2	127	90	\$47,935
Boxelder	99	South Dakota	1	124	121	\$44,258
Lyndon B. Johnson	101	North Carolina	4	120	116	\$46,680
Timber Lake	102	Oregon	6	165	179	\$33,218
Great Onyx	104	Kentucky	7	127	113	\$40,260
Jacobs Creek	111	Tennessee	2	111	93	\$58,603
Cass	115	Arkansas	2	119	109	\$55,246

Source: Department of Labor (DOL). | GAO-20-240R

Notes: The blue highlighted centers were proposed for closure. Job Corps operates on a program year (PY) basis, which runs from July 1 of a given year to June 30 of the following year. For example, program year 2018 ran from July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019. According to DOL, the Centennial center was excluded from this analysis because it was participating in a partnership/demonstration project.

^aThe centers are listed in order from the highest ranking to the lowest ranking.

Enclosure II: Comments from the Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Labor

Assistant Secretary for
Employment and Training
Washington, D.C. 20210



MAR 31 2020

Ms. Cindy S. Brown-Barnes
Director
Education, Workforce,
and Income Security Issues
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G. Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Brown-Barnes:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) draft report titled, "Job Corps: DOL Should Provide Greater Transparency in Communicating Its Rationale for Closure Decisions" (GAO-20-240R, Job Code 103660).

The Department of Labor's (Department) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) appreciates GAO's finding that the data used by the Department to identify nine Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers for closure in ETA's May 30, 2019 *Federal Register* notice was supported by sufficiently reliable data for the purposes of reporting information related to access, performance, cost, and student recruitment. The Department does not propose closure of a Job Corps center lightly and, consistent with the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), ensures that closure decisions are based on established criteria supported by reliable data.

In its draft report, the GAO made the following recommendation:

"The Assistant Secretary of DOL's Employment and Training Administration should include detailed information on the methodology used to identify centers for proposed closure in its notices for public comment."

ETA agrees with the purpose and intent of this recommendation. Congress, in outlining specific requirements for center closures in WIOA, granted the Department flexibility in the factors it applies in selecting centers for closure. In exercising its closure authority, the Department is committed to clearly articulating and quantifying the criteria underlying a proposal to close a Job Corps center. These criteria, and how they are applied, were published in the *Federal Register* on August 27, 2014¹ and subsequently updated on March 9, 2016² and May 30, 2019.³

¹ 79 FR 51198 (August 27, 2014), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2014-08-27/pdf/2014-20334.pdf>

² 81 FR 12529 (March 9, 2016), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-03-09/pdf/2016-04977.pdf>

³ 84 FR 25071 (May 30, 2019), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-05-30/pdf/2019-11262.pdf>

The Department will continue to ensure, as it has done in the past, that future closure proposals both comply with WIOA's requirements and provide a meaningful opportunity for public comment.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide a response to the draft report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Pallasch".

John Pallasch
Assistant Secretary for Employment and Training

Enclosure III: Comments from the U.S. Department of Agriculture



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Washington Office

1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

File Code: 1420

Date: MAR 18 2020

Ms. Cindy Brown Barnes
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G. Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Brown Barnes:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service appreciates the opportunity to review the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report "Job Corps: DOL Should Provide Greater Transparency in Communicating Its Rationale for Closure Decisions, (GAO-20-240R)." The Agency agrees with the draft report and notes there were no recommendations for the Forest Service.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to review the draft report. If you have any questions, please contact Antoine L. Dixon, Chief Financial Officer, at antoine.dixon@usda.gov or (202) 205-0429.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Christiansen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "n".

VICTORIA CHRISTIANSEN
Chief



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Enclosure IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Cindy Brown Barnes, (202) 512-7215 or brownbarnesc@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Mary Crenshaw (Assistant Director), Cathy Roark (Analyst-in-Charge), Ramona Burton, Elizabeth Calderon, Alex Galuten, LaToya King, Sheila R. McCoy, Jean McSween, Chris Morehouse, Steve Morris, Stacy Ouellette, Curtia Taylor, Almeta Spencer, and Ashanta Williams made significant contributions to this report.

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