

Trade Adjustment Assistance Act of 2015

The Trade Adjustment Assistance Act of 2015 reauthorizes the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program through 2020 and renews the program's 2009-2010 eligibility and benefit levels. Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) provides necessary assistance for workers who have lost their job due to trade. DOL estimates that since 1975 over two million workers have relied on the TAA program to receive benefits to make ends meet and the training necessary to find new employment. Congress included a short-term TAA extension in the omnibus bill last year, but the statutory authority for the program expires entirely at the end of this fiscal year.

Eligibility: The Trade Adjustment Assistance Act restores TAA eligibility to the levels included in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Specifically, the bill allows service sector workers and public sector workers to receive benefits if they lose their jobs due to trade. Only manufacturing sector workers, fisherman, and farmers are currently eligible for the program. The bill also reinstates eligibility for workers affected by trade with any trading partner, not just countries with whom the U.S. has a free trade agreement.

Benefits: Trade Readjustment Allowances (TRA) provides workers with continued unemployment benefits while they are in training. The Trade Adjustment Assistance Act extends the number of weeks workers are eligible for additional TRA by 13 weeks. The bill also provides workers an additional 26 weeks of TRA if they need it to complete training that leads to a degree or industry recognized credential in that period.

TAA beneficiaries may apply for job search and relocation allowances. The bill allows 100 percent of these job search and relocation expenses to be paid up to \$1,500, an increase from 90 percent and \$1,250. In addition, the bill increases to \$12,000 the supplemental wages that can be paid to workers at least 50 years of age whose new job pays less than their old job. The bill also raises the salary cap for eligibility for these older workers from \$50,000 to \$55,000.

Health Care Tax Credit: Often workers lose their health care when they lose their job. Under the bill, workers have the opportunity to receive either an Affordable Care Act (ACA) tax credit, or opt-in to the Health Care Tax Credit program to receive TAA assistance to purchase health insurance. The HCTC expired at the end of 2013. The bill also increases the amount of tax credit for which workers are eligible from 72.5 percent to 80 percent of the insurance premium.

TAA, TAACCCT, and TAAF Funding: The bill restores TAA funding to the previous level of \$575 million for reemployment services. The bill reauthorizes the Trade Adjustment Assistance for Community College and Career Training program, which provides funding to community colleges and other educational institutions to provide training programs that can be completed in two years. Trade Adjustment Assistance for Firms provides financial assistance and expertise to import-impacted manufacturers to help them become more globally competitive. The bill restores TAA for Firms annual authorization levels to \$50 million, an increase from \$16 million.

Long-term Authorization: The bill reauthorizes the TAA program through the end of 2020. Congress' recent authorizations of the program have been short-term. As a result, parts of the program have expired before Congress could pass legislation. DOL has faced a complicated implementation process, and trade-affected workers have faced uncertainty about their ability to afford job training. This bill provides a long-term reauthorization for a program critical to supporting and advancing America's workers.