

**AVENUES TO SUCCESS: EXAMINING WORKFORCE
TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR EMPLOYEES**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INNOVATION,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

OF THE

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FORCE TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR
EMPLOYEES**

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INNOVATION,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:03 a.m., in Room 2360, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Marcus J. Molinaro [chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Molinaro, Williams, Mann, McGarvey, Thanedar, and Chu.

Chairman MOLINARO. Good morning, everybody. Thank you for joining the Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development.

Before we get started, I would like to recognize the Ranking Member, Representative Mc Garvey, to lead us in the pledge and a prayer.

Mr. MCGARVEY. We thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to be together. We ask for your wisdom. We ask for your grace. We ask for your patience in these matters. We ask that you bless all of us to make decisions in the testimony the best we can.

In your name we pray. Amen.

All. I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Chairman MOLINARO. Thank you, sir.

I now call the Committee on Small Business to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Committee at any time.

I would now like to recognize myself for an opening statement and appreciate you all for being here. And I welcome those of you on our panel to the Subcommittee.

First, to each of our witnesses, thank you. We recognize your time is valuable and hope you know we appreciate you spending time with us and look forward to your testimonies.

The current labor shortage in the United States is disproportionately affecting small businesses, with 40 percent of small employers unable to fill job openings as of August. This crisis is exacerbated by economic pressures from the Biden-Harris Administration, with many businesses struggling to find qualified talent amid ris-

ing costs and inflation. The construction, healthcare, and automotive sectors are particularly in need, facing significant deficits in skilled labor that could hinder growth and increase project delays.

These on-the-ground issues small businesses face are exacerbated in rural and underserved communities like the ones I represent in upstate New York. The labor shortage is not confined to small employers, as we likely know. The broader labor market is facing one of the most challenging years in recent history. Contributing factors include an aging workforce, with projections indicating that 41 percent of workers nearing retirement by 2031 will lead to a substantial loss of institutional knowledge.

Additionally, younger individuals are entering the workforce at a lower-than-expected rate. Many workers laid off during the pandemic and economic shutdown are unwilling to return to jobs—jobs lacking remote work options, reflecting a shift in employment—in employee expectations.

And despite these challenges, I would note that people with disabilities still represent an untapped workforce. This Subcommittee has spent some time focused, in fact, on this population. Their participation in the labor market has surged since the pandemic, with 1.8 million joining, bringing their employment rate up to 25 percent, the highest in 15 years. Organizations like Community Options, Inc., represented here today, are crucial in providing training and job placement, partnering with major companies to support individuals with disabilities. Hiring these workers not only promotes inclusivity but also boosts workplace morale and results in lower turnover and absentee rates.

For me, that is why I introduced the Think DIFFERENTLY Initiative and Think DIFFERENTLY About Disability Employment Act, to help small businesses address accessibility issues for employees with disabilities, encouraging the hiring of those with intellectual, physical, and developmental disabilities, and help entrepreneurs with disabilities succeed.

We were proud to see this piece of legislation pass the House. And I was also proud to co-lead the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Reporting Act, alongside Ranking Member Mc Garvey, to better understand the challenges entrepreneurs with disabilities face.

Addressing the skills gap through workforce development is essential. Traditional education paths may not suit everyone, and we know this. And skilled trades offer viable alternatives. Combatting the ongoing labor shortage by supporting our skilled trade schools and apprenticeship programs is a bipartisan effort.

And I worked alongside my colleagues and fellow Small Business Committee Member, in this case Representative Scholten, to introduce the Honoring Vocational Education Act, which ensures individuals who attend job training programs, trade schools, union apprenticeships, and other like programs are recognized as obtaining a post-secondary nondegree award.

Additionally, I was proud to co-lead the Small Business Workforce Pipeline Act to help small businesses offer more apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities.

In order to alleviate the labor shortage and support small businesses, it is vital to harness the potential of people with disabilities and to also promote skilled trades. By focusing on these areas,

there is potential for significant improvement in the labor market, ultimately benefiting both small businesses and the broader economy.

First, want to thank our witnesses again for joining us today. I look forward to the conversation ahead.

And with that, I yield to our distinguished Ranking Member from Kentucky, Mr. McGarvey.

Mr. MCGARVEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for bringing us together today to discuss how we can tackle one of the most persistent challenges that faces small businesses and our economy. That is the workforce shortage.

Everywhere I go—I bet it is the same in your district too—everywhere I go, we are hearing the same thing: Small business owners are struggling to find and keep qualified workers. It is not just anecdotal, though. There are survey upon survey upon survey confirming that finding workers is the top operational challenge facing small businesses. More than inflation, more than supply chains, more than regulations.

This isn't new. Even before the pandemic, there were workforce shortages, particularly in the skilled trades. Part of the problem is the longstanding misconception that the only path to the middle class is through a 4-year college degree. Unfortunately, we know that college, while right for some, is not right for everyone. But our focus on college has led to a chronic underfunding of career and vocational training programs that would help fill those jobs in the highest demand today.

Thankfully, over the past few years, we are doing better, and we are seeing real investment in workforce training and apprenticeships and a surge in interest by young people. For instance, apprenticeships have more than doubled over the past decade, helping younger people earn while they learn and enter high-paying jobs without shouldering the cost and the debt of a college degree.

In Kentucky alone we have seen a 144 percent increase in apprenticeship enrollment in the last decade. That number continues to grow. Programs at the high school level, such as career and technical education programs, are gaining popularity as well. And they help students develop skills that can guide them into apprenticeships on traditional education pathways.

Because of their newfound popularity, the biggest problem with these programs is now finding available instructors rather than convincing students to enroll.

It is time for Congress to invest in career and technical education so that we can reap the full benefits of our investments, and transformative legislation, like the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act. These laws create millions of jobs, but those jobs require specific skill sets, and we must ensure that we are providing the training needed to fill them.

Apprenticeship programs too are not only essential for training workers but offer avenues to entrepreneurship. For apprentices interested in starting their own businesses, union trainers can help them access courses that introduce them to the management side of the industry.

While I am optimistic about the progress we have made, we know there is still a long way to go. Other industrialized nations are investing far more in workforce development than we are. The U.S. currently invests less than \$20 billion across 43 federal employment and training programs, less than .01 percent of our GDP, while our peers are putting up five times that amount.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs, the backbone of the federal government's workforce development efforts, are both underutilized and underfunded, and since 2019, unauthorized. Earlier this year, the House overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and we hope to see the Senate follow suit soon.

Any of you who are sports fans will understand what I mean when I say that our workforce development system, like the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville basketball teams, is in a rebuilding phase. But with the right investments and approach, we can build something stronger that meets the needs of our economy, supports small businesses, and gives every American the chance and opportunity to get ahead. Building the workforce of tomorrow begins with our investments today.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and I yield back.
Chairman MOLINARO. Thank you, Mr. McGarvey.

For the record, as a New York Mets fan, we are always in the rebuilding phase. This may, however, be our year.

Somebody who knows a little bit about sports as well, let me recognize the distinguished gentleman from Texas, the Chairman of the full Committee, Mr. Williams.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Well, thank you. And I don't know if this is the year for the Mets. Don't get too—they are close right now.

Chairman MOLINARO. It is never the year for the Mets.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Good morning. And I want to thank my good friend, Chairman Molinaro, for holding today's Subcommittee hearing to discuss our nation's current labor shortage and workforce development issues.

To start off, I would like to thank our witnesses for being here. Thank you very much. We appreciate you taking the time to come out and contribute to a very important discussion today.

And to put this simply, main street is facing a dire labor shortage, with 90 percent of businesses reporting few or no qualified applicants in August. Industries like construction are particularly affected, with the projection showing the need for over 500,000 additional workers annually. This is why it is more important than ever that we promote skilled trades to grow our economy and combat the workforce shortage. These jobs are not only in demand but also allow people to learn a valued skill without needing to take on tens of thousands of dollars in student loan debt in order to get the proper training.

So additionally, there is another segment of our population that has been overlooked as we look to have more people enter the workforce, and people with disabilities are very entrepreneurial and can add value to many businesses. We have already heard about the first hearing we held with Congress where we had a 16-year-old, Drew Davis, come before us, talk about his story of creating his own hot sauce company. He has cerebral palsy, but he did

not let it hold him back as he pursued his dream. His story was inspiring, and it showed that with a little help, anyone can be an entrepreneur in America.

So I want to again thank Chairman Molinaro for—and the Ranking Member for bringing the Committee to—attention to these workforce issues that are affecting main street businesses, and I look forward to today’s conversations.

And I yield back.

Chairman MOLINARO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me now introduce our witnesses.

First, with us here today is Ms. Ashley Gamba. Ms. Gamba is the executive director of Community Options, Inc., located in Binghamton, New York. Founded in 1989, Community Options is a nationwide nonprofit organization that develops housing and employment opportunities for people with intellectual, physical, and developmental disabilities. Since its founding, Community Options has expanded their services to over 10 States, partnering with local governments to provide employment opportunities across the country.

Throughout my time in public service, I can tell you that Community Options has been a leader and a voice for our disability community, especially throughout Broome County in New York State.

One of the organization’s most memorable events is the annual Cupid’s Chase in Binghamton, which brings together our community in support for those with disabilities. From hosting job training events to building out their new pharmacy technician workforce program to creating an internship program with Legends at Yankee Stadium, Community Options empowers those with disabilities to meaningfully contribute to main street and lead more independent lives.

Ms. Gamba has been with Community Options, Inc., since 2017, when she began as the State Director of Employment Services before moving to her current position last year as Executive Director. Ms. Gamba attended the University of Buffalo, where she earned her Master’s of Science in Vocational Rehabilitation counseling.

And I am certainly grateful to you for joining us here today for today’s discussion.

Our next witness is Mr. Frank Stento. Mr. Stento is the Director of Business Development in District Council Number 4 Painters & Allied Trades, located in Binghamton, New York. District Council 4 represents 2,000 active and retired men and women in 33 counties throughout western and central New York. Representing those in the finishing trades, District 4 has been a leader in providing high-quality, work-based training programs for those seeking a career in the trades.

Mr. Stento has been involved with District 4 since 2018, where he began as Business Development Specialist. In addition to his position as Director of Business Development, Mr. Stento serves as the President of District Council 4 Local 178 and is Vice President of the Binghamton-Oneonta Building Trades.

Mr. Stento earned his Associate’s of Arts and Science in workforce development and training from Mountwest Community & Technical College. I’m a big fan of community colleges.

Thank you, sir, for joining us today for this conversation.

And now let me recognize Ranking Member McGarvey to introduce our last witness appearing before us today.

Mr. MCGARVEY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Our final witness today is Mr. Neal Strange. He is director of education at the Indiana Kentucky Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters. Three States, but one gets a little more emphasis there from us. And he is part of the Joint Apprenticeship & Training Fund.

Mr. Strange is a 15-year Member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, and currently serves as director of education, overseeing the operations of nine training centers across Indiana and Kentucky. These centers support over 4,000 apprentices as well as the continuing education program.

Mr. Strange is himself a graduate of UBC's 4-year apprenticeship program and holds an associate of applied science in construction technologies and a journeyman carpenter designation.

After working in the field, he transitioned to a career in education, becoming a full-time instructor in 2022.

Thank you, Mr. Strange, for joining us today.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman MOLINARO. Thank you, Mr. McGarvey.

We appreciate you all being here today with us.

I do want to extend our appreciation to the staff of the Small Business Committee and, of course, our two offices for coordinating today's hearing.

And before recognizing the witnesses, let me also remind each of you that your testimony today is restricted to 5 minutes. If you see the light turn red in front of you, it means your time is up. And Mr. McGarvey gets very, very anxious. And to the extent you can, please just wrap up your testimony at that point.

And with that, let me recognize Ms. Gamba for your opening remarks. Thank you.

STATEMENTS OF MS. ASHLEY GAMBA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY OPTIONS, INC.; MR. FRANK STENTO, DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, PAINTERS AND ALLIED TRADES UNION DISTRICT COUNCIL #4; AND MR. NEAL STRANGE, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, INDIANA KENTUCKY OHIO REGIONAL COUNCIL OF CARPENTERS JOINT APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAINING FUND

STATEMENT OF MS. ASHLEY GAMBA

Ms. GAMBA. Dear Chairman Williams, Ranking Member McGarvey, Members of the U.S. House Committee on Small Business, as the executive director for Community Options New York, I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide written testimony, or verbal testimony, to the U.S. House Committee on Small Business regarding workforce training programs that are available to help small business owners expand their labor pool.

Over the past year, we have supported over 5,000 people with disabilities, including 2,100 people receiving employment services, assisting them with developing the skills needed to obtain and maintain meaningful, competitive, integrated employment.

Community Options has had the opportunity to develop innovative training programs in partnership with numerous businesses to assist with positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities across New York State. We have partnered with Legends at Yankee Stadium to provide hands-on integrated training in the following areas: merchandising, food service, customer service, and retail. By providing work readiness training to assist participants with building the soft skills related to employment, hands-on experience to develop transferable work skills, and on-site training and support, we have successfully placed over 200 individuals in paid work experiences that have resulted in 80 percent of placement in competitive employment settings.

Additionally, through partnership with the NBA Foundation, Community Options has received funding to provide training and employment supports to minority youth with disabilities across several States. This funding has enabled us to identify youth with disabilities and provide work readiness training, career exploration counseling, job placement, and job coaching services. This couldn't be done without our small business partners, local businesses and organizations that have assisted with allowing us the opportunity to provide on-site training and job coaching supports to the individuals that we work with.

Most recently, we have had the opportunity to partner with CVS Health to provide retail, front and back store, supervisor training, and a Department of Labor-funded pre-apprenticeship training program for pharm technicians, or pharmacy technicians. Through this partnership we have had the opportunity to build a career readiness center offering hands-on training to further develop the transferable work skills required for competitive employment.

In our ever-evolving economy, it has become apparent that hiring to meet the needs of many small businesses has proven to be difficult. In a recent survey conducted by SCORE, more than 50 percent of small businesses reported that it was very or somewhat difficult to fill open positions, citing it has been most problematic to find skilled or qualified workers.

Additionally, according to the Society for Human Resources Management, approximately 97 percent of HR professionals and 92 percent of people managers say that employees with disabilities often perform at the same or better level than their coworkers without disabilities, yet this population often faces significant challenges when attempting to obtain meaningful employment.

As always, we are very thankful for our small business partners who work closely with our agency to provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. We encourage small businesses across the country to partner with local agencies to increase the availability and accessibility to training programs designed to train and develop the skills of this underrepresented population.

And we also urge Congress to continue to strengthen funding for the vocational and pre-apprenticeship opportunities for both youth and adults with disabilities.

Chairman MOLINARO. Thank you, Ashley. Appreciate that very much.

I now recognize Mr. Stento for your 5-minute opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF MR. FRANK STENTO

Mr. STENTO. Thank you.

Good morning, Chairman Williams, Chairman Molinaro, and esteemed Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the invite to give testimony today on my experience with registered apprenticeship programs and the—and how they can impact positively workforce development moving forward.

So I have got a great—I have a great deal of gratitude for my organization, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades; for the small business owners, also known as the subcontractors, who employed me out in the field; for my instructors and journey workers that supported and trained me to become a skilled craftsman; and then to my mentors that challenged me and took the time to help me develop.

What do those all have in common? The workforce model of a registered apprenticeship program, which has a rich history in the United States and has a bright future to come.

Like many others before me, this system provided me an opportunity, a purpose, and the tools to achieve success. Apprenticeship in the skilled trades offers a unique opportunity to gain hands-on experience while earning a living.

Unlike traditional classroom education, as Ranking Member McGarvey said, an earn-while-you-learn apprenticeship allows you to gain knowledge by working under the guidance of experienced professionals in the industry. Practical training ensures that you develop the technical skills necessary to excel in your chosen field, whether it is plumbing, electrical, carpentry, or like myself, in the finishing trades. This leads to full-time employment, providing a clear path to a stable career without the burden of student loan debt.

The other 4-year degree is what we commonly reference a registered apprenticeship program. Although the timeframe depending on a craft and curriculum can be anywhere from 3 to 5 years.

Beyond the technical skills, apprenticeships also foster personal development. They teach you how to work in real-world environments, solve problems on the spot, and communicate effectively on job sites and beyond. These skills are invaluable across many areas of life and make apprentices highly sought after by employers.

Furthermore, the demand for skilled tradespeople continues to grow, offering long-term job security and competitive wages. With the abundance of mega products on the horizon, combined with a workforce that is aging, there is an urgency to get new candidates in the pipeline to sustain the industry for those small business owners long term.

Apprenticeship not only builds expertise but sets the foundation for a rewarding and sustainable career. In apprenticeship school, our instructors teach hands-on applications and best practices. A large component is dedicated to health and safety to minimize accidents in the field. There is conversations around tools, equipment, and technologies in the craft. Training around financial literacy, social skills, the history of the trade, and advances in the industry are also incorporated. We complete mockups in-house for repetition in the craft and perform projects for nonprofits in the community.

After apprenticeship school, there is a huge focus on journey worker upgrading, as we have an obligation to maintain our reputation as the most highly skilled, safe, and productive workforce performing our crafts.

We have—pardon me. We have an online learning management system with hundreds of courses to choose from, including blueprint reading, estimating essentials, and project management. This helps with the retention of our workforce, and the constant training makes those involved more employable.

The way we have our apprenticeship set up, it is called block training, which is 4 full weeks a year during the months of January through April. The rest of the apprenticeship is made up of on-the-job training with our contracted partners and our skilled journey workers.

A high-paying and sustainable career with benefits in the construction field is the ultimate purpose of a registered apprenticeship program. With continuing education and training opportunities, additional pathways can be accessed in the industry.

Some of the best and brightest foremen, superintendents, project managers, contractors—and the list goes on—came through an apprenticeship program with—and had field experience.

I completed my apprenticeship in 2016. I received 40 college credits through an articulation agreement with Mountwest Community & Technical College, which I am grateful for. I then finished my associate's degree. I was running projects in the field and started instructing part time through our district council, which then eventually led to a full-time staff position in business development, also known as organizing.

Now one of the best parts of my career is seeing others come in and find similar success and watching their trajectories and life change. An apprenticeship program is a great way to start a career, as well as a necessary system to continue the pipeline of skilled journey workers to business owners.

Any opportunities that we have to increase apprenticeships will greatly assist the challenges surrounding supply and demand that dominate recent conversation in the industry, while simultaneously raising up those middle-class workers.

I thank you for your time, and look forward to your questions.
Chairman MOLINARO. Thanks, Frank.

Mr. Strange, for your opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF MR. NEAL STRANGE

Mr. STRANGE. Yes. So good morning, Chairman Molinaro, Ranking Member McGarvey, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Neal Strange, as addressed earlier by Mr. McGarvey. I am the director of education for the Indiana Kentucky Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship and Training Fund, also a 15-year Member of the UBC, and a graduate of the program myself.

I am here to provide an overview of our apprenticeship program and the continuing education we offer to our Members. This program is not just about learning a trade. It is about ensuring our Members are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to

thrive in an ever-changing industry. Our council consists of 38,000 Members within Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio, and over 550,000 Members across the United States and Canada. We represent the carpenters, millwrights, piledrivers, and floor layers who are building our country's bridges, highways, manufacturing sites, hospitals, schools, and power production facilities.

At the core of our training philosophy is the belief that our contractors must remain relevant and prepared for both existing and emerging construction markets. To achieve this, we partner closely with contractors, manufacturers, and local universities to meet their specific needs. Together, we provide a robust training curriculum that emphasizes both productivity and safety, ensuring that our Members deliver high-quality product on every site.

One of the greatest strengths of our program is that all training is provided at no cost to the individual Members. Funding for our programs comes from contributions made for every hour worked on a job site by our signatory contractors. Nevertheless, we lift the financial burden off of those contractors, allowing them to focus on project execution without worrying about additional expenses related to training workers and ensuring their workforce has the proper certifications necessary for specific jobs. Our members benefit from a top-tier education while our contractors benefit from a highly skilled workforce.

In terms of compensation, our apprentices are paid on a scaled wage basis. The wage structure provides apprentices with fair compensation as they build their skills, which further incentivizes retention and productivity. This model also allows our contractors to remain competitive in the market while employing highly trained and motivated workers.

We offer multiple pathways into our program, creating accessibility for our diverse group of candidates. We have partnerships with high school career and technical education programs, adult education initiatives, State and county reentry programs, and military veteran organizations, such as Helmets to Hardhats and our own internal military veterans program. These pathways ensure that we are tapping into a wide range of talent allowing for diversity and inclusion in our workforce.

In the past 4 years, our apprenticeship enrollment has grown by 40 percent, reflecting both the demand for skilled labor and also the increasing awareness of the opportunities our program offers for career growth and development. Current enrollment across our three States totals more than 6,900 apprentices. This includes 22 percent minority enrollment and 6 percent female enrollment.

From the moment an apprentice begins our program, safety becomes an integral part of their education. Beginning with an OSHA 10 certification and continuing throughout their apprenticeship, safety protocols are embedded into every aspect of training. A safe worker is an effective worker, and this foundation is key to the longevity of their career and the protection of our job sites.

For Members who aspire to further advance their careers beyond the apprenticeship, we offer additional pathways into leadership roles, project management, and business ownership. Whether a Member seeks to move into superintendent or management positions or has an entrepreneurial spirit and wishes to start their own

contracting business, our continuing education resources equip them with the skills and confidence to succeed.

We recognize the importance of nurturing leadership from within, and our specialized programs allow our Members to thrive in roles that require strategic thinking and operational oversight.

Our program's reach extends well beyond training the individual. We play a crucial role in economic development by placing our skilled workers on the jobs that span from small business ventures to large-scale national projects. For smaller contractors looking to explore new markets, we provide access to a pool of well-trained workers who can meet the demands of these new opportunities.

Meanwhile, larger contractors, particularly those involved in mega projects related to the CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also benefit from our training programs.

Since 2023, more than 4,500 Members within our three-State council have been employed in projects stemming from these acts, including Intel, Ford Blue Oval, and numerous renewable energy projects, covering solar, hydro, and wind. These initiatives require a workforce that is both large and highly skilled, which our program delivers.

Since our inception in 1881, the UBC has organized the membership necessary to meet contractor and end-user needs. Our privately funded training keeps us ahead of the curve. We understand that if our signatory contractors are not successful, we will not be successful. We have no seniority in our collective bargaining agreements, and no contractor is bound to employ a Member they find unproductive. This competitive environment is necessary for our success, and this is done at no cost to the taxpayer.

In summary, our apprenticeship program and continuing education initiatives are designed to support both our Members and the contractors they serve. We provide cost-free, high-quality training that focuses on safety, competitiveness, career advancement, and long-term development. By doing so, we help drive economic growth, foster innovation, and build a workforce that is ready to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Thank you for your time.

Chairman MOLINARO. Well done. Thank you.

I appreciate all of you.

We will begin the question round under the 5-minute rule. And with that, I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Ms. Gamba, I want to start with you. We have talked about this extensively. Certainly, acknowledging that, since the pandemic, nearly 2 million Americans with disabilities have joined the workforce; it is a 28 percent increase from pre-pandemic levels. Yet as we all recognize, approximately 70 percent of those with intellectual, physical, and developmental disabilities remain unemployed and outside the workforce. And that is obviously both a challenge and an opportunity.

Could we start by just talking, if you would, what are some of the challenges that business owners either articulate or you know face when hiring those with disabilities, and what steps might we take to make that transition into the workforce easier for the employer?

Ms. GAMBA. I think they are often worried or concerned about, like, the stigma or the liability of hiring somebody that might need additional supports. As an agency, we—if we are going in to provide any intensive—

Chairman MOLINARO. You can continue.

Ms. GAMBA.—intensive, you know, job training support, we will add the employer on to our liability insurance, which will kind of, I guess, alleviate some of the concerns that an employer may have.

Chairman MOLINARO. Those—so those supports through likely the support staff and what have you, what are the challenges, then, the agency faces in providing those—that support?

Ms. GAMBA. Employers may be concerned about having the individuals onsite. They might not communicate very well, allowing us to provide any intervention that may be needed. And then workplace accommodations, there is often a concern about any money that a small business would have to spend.

Chairman MOLINARO. So why don't you tell us one of the benefits or at least we identify the benefits that that employer would see by bringing in and ultimately employing an individual with a disability.

Ms. GAMBA. I think that it helps with turnover. Our—the individuals that we put into different small businesses have identified that they have the skills for the job and the interest in working there. So if we are in there helping with any intensive job training or supports, they tend to remain employed for longer periods of time and it reduces turnover.

Chairman MOLINARO. Thank you, Ashley.

Frank, let me say this without question. The skilled trades are the backbone of upstate New York.

Mr. STENTO. Thank you.

Chairman MOLINARO. And, frankly, you all contribute both to our economy, keeping our neighbors employed, and I will say, making sure that projects are staffed by New Yorkers and not employment from out of State or out of country.

You talk a lot about—and, of course, Mr. McGarvey acknowledged—the earn-while-you-learn apprenticeship model. Can you just expand a little bit on the benefits of registered apprenticeships? And within the time I have, what steps can we take to expand access to and support those registered apprenticeship programs?

Mr. STENTO. Sure. Thank you.

You know, one thing in addition to what I had already mentioned in my testimony would be how one our apprentices are starting to gain contributions towards their healthcare and towards their retirement. In addition, they have structured pay raises that are—that we work with the New York State Department of Labor throughout their apprenticeship program as they move—as they progress through that. They have eligibility for employee assurance programs.

And then the biggest thing that I would say an advantage for an apprentice coming in would be they are building up a skilled craft that is highly—that is in very high demand, highly marketable. And once they learn that skilled craft from our journey workers and our small business owners when they are out in the field, there

is nobody that can take that away from them. They are going to have the ability to go and provide for themselves and their families for the rest of their lives.

So one thing that I will say that something that our government partners could assist with would be looking into more apprenticeship language on all projects moving forward, which would incentivize our small business owners, our contractors, to increase the ratios of apprentices on projects upcoming.

Chairman MOLINARO. Thank you for that. I will say, in local government, the first step we took was to require apprentice language in our major contracts, which just enhances the pipeline and gets folks from maybe K-12, right, into the workforce and prepared.

I do want to note before acknowledging Mr. McGarvey, the more usual than you would imagine bipartisan support for both trying to advance those with disabilities into the workforce and the trades on the ground.

And with that, let me acknowledge Mr. McGarvey for his 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGARVEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today, for your incredibly thoughtful testimony. We really appreciate it. And want to give a special thanks to Mr. Strange who came up here from my region of the country.

And, Mr. Chairman, you talked about how the trades are the backbone of upstate New York, and certainly in Louisville, Kentucky, we feel the same way. I say all the time, Louisville is a union town. And truly, from the fact that every Ford Escape and every Ford F-250 and above is made in Louisville, Kentucky, and that our baseball bats and even our bourbon are made with union labor right there in Louisville, Kentucky. And we—we appreciate all the carpenters from Local 175 do for our city and our community.

With apprenticeships' proven track record of success—I think that is important here. We are not talking about something theoretical. We know that these apprenticeship programs work—it seems that it is a wasted opportunity to not continue investing in these programs. So I am excited to have this hearing today to uplift these initiatives, as the Chairman said, in a bipartisan way.

Mr. Strange, I am going to start with you. How has the increased availability and popularity of the apprenticeship programs changed the calculus of young people who are looking for the next step, and what are you seeing on the ground?

Mr. STRANGE. Well, as I addressed in my opening remarks, we have seen 40 percent growth in 3 years alone inside of our apprenticeship programs. We are seeing more and more involved at the CT level at the high schools, increased partnerships at high schools, and also other entry-level pathways for us.

So with that, we are just seeing more and more availability, more opportunities to grow. And also, we are seeing a better view of the general public on who we are and what we have to offer, especially with parents of children that are coming out of these programs. We actually do nights with them specifically to be able to explain to them who we are, why we are going to provide that safe work environment for their children whenever they come out. That

is a big concern from parents. So we found some trade on those type of efforts.

Mr. MCGARVEY. Appreciate that. I think two things we have agreed on today and that we know, we know apprenticeship programs work, we know that small businesses right now need qualified workers. And so we are trying to get that done.

When you are looking at the apprenticeship program, how many of your apprenticeship programs are—your apprentices are going to small businesses to work in those sectors, and how are they kind of helping small businesses fill those gaps and meet their goals in terms of having qualified workers?

Mr. STRANGE. So as Frank talked about earlier in his portion as well, you know, with the larger projects that are coming along, that is offering opportunity for a lot of smaller businesses to step in. By us providing the skilled workforce for them to be able to have to go provide the workforce they need on these projects, and then also the training that they need to be able to—and we are seeing a lot of job sites that have requirements on them for certifications for Members to be able to hold—we provide that training opportunity for them and also provide that opportunity for that workforce.

Mr. MCGARVEY. And, Mr. Stento, I will go over to you as well. Mr. Strange just mentioned a 40 percent increase in their apprenticeship programs. Are you seeing similar type numbers in your area?

Mr. STENTO. We are seeing significant increases. We actually just had our largest apprenticeship class since I have been on staff, which is over 6 years, about 250 apprentices that are going to be coming in for this coming school year. So there has been, and it has been intentional, right.

We see the need to work with our retirees that are coming up with the mega projects that we are going to have to have some urgency that has to be strategic and how we intend to fulfill these projects. So there has been, yes, a major increase in our Members as well and other trades in the Broome County region.

Some of our apprenticeship programs, the carpenters up there just a little north of Broome County, in Onondaga, just opened up a new training facility. Plumbers and pipefitters are doing the same thing, all in the anticipation of increased apprenticeship numbers so that we are able to fulfill pipeline to our small business owners in years to come.

And then these apprentices will eventually be the future of our—they are the future of our workforce and of the industry, and they will be able to, in a short period of time, relatively, have the skills necessary to be then mentoring and teaching the generation following them.

Mr. MCGARVEY. And thank you so much. As we run out of time, I will just underscore your point. You said that they are, in fact, the future of your workforce. We have got these major projects coming up, things coming up from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, et cetera.

But by being the future, we also know and agree that is the backbone of our community, the future of our community as well. So we appreciate that testimony.

Chairman MOLINARO. Thank you, Mr. McGarvey.

Let me now recognize for 5 minutes the gentlewoman from California, Ms. Chu.

Ms. CHU. Well, I want to thank all the witnesses for all your great work in putting people to work. So thank you for that.

Mr. Strange, you have helped individuals from so many walks of life enter the job market prepared and trained in the incredibly important field of carpentry, which is especially critical for taking full advantage of the investments made by the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

I believe local workforce training facilities are a key component to meeting this growing need and supporting our nation's workers, which is why I secured community project funding for two workforce development and job training facilities in my district. This includes the Pasadena facilities for jobs creation training and education center. It recognizes the fact that a 4-year college degree is not for everybody. And this will help connect high school age students to vocational training for so many different fields, including EMT training, automotive technology, construction, and building trades, and even robotics.

So I would like to hear you talk about how community-based job training programs like this one can help support apprenticeship programs offered by unions like yours. How can these types of programs work together to help build a bigger pipeline into important trades like carpentry?

Mr. STRANGE. Yes. So one of the ways that we already have established in our area is that we can provide an articulation agreement along with them. So if they have the requirements met inside of their training facilities, that can be a direct entry pathway into our programs.

So with that, as long as everything inside of those facilities is there in line, we work together with to create that, and we also provide a curriculum pathway to be able to provide for those that want with our own internal UBC-designed program for that type of need.

Ms. CHU. Okay. That is wonderful.

I would like to have Mr. Strange and then Mr. Stento answer this question, which is, the work you do is a testament to the strength and importance of our nation's unions. Because Democrats passed and President Biden signed into law the landmark Inflation Reduction Act, so many new job opportunities in the green energy space have become available, which you mentioned in your testimony.

And because the Inflation Reduction Act provided special bonus tax credits to businesses that pay prevailing wages and support registered apprenticeship programs on their projects, unions play a critical role in providing the specialized on-the-job training to apprentices on these projects.

So can you talk about the role that unions and their workers play in developing the diverse and skilled workforce that our country needs?

Mr. STRANGE. I can speak to that one directly in our area. So first off, you addressed on there because of the strong apprenticeship requirements on these projects that has given our contractors

a leg up and be able to. With the solar industry in particular, we have partnered together with many manufacturers that have come in. We provided the training that they have had for their specific products, and we have been able to meet the needs going out on to those. And currently, this year alone, we have produced over 2 million work hours in our three-State council to be able to meet the needs on and—because of those acts.

Mr. STENTO. Okay. So in our industry, we cover—two of the crafts that we cover, I think, would fall underneath this. Industrial coatings, bridges, tanks, water towers, which we have certifications for—for the coatings applicators, as well as for the contractors that are performing these. And as you mentioned, part of some of these tax credits are tied into apprenticeships.

So we are seeing an uptick in—you know, from the engineers, as well as developers, working more in tandem with our signatory contractors.

Another craft that we cover is glass glazing architectural metal. So you have got dynamic glass, you have got 179D tax credits that are—that do have some overlap with that industry as well. Green energy, total building envelope.

So this is something that we have, what is called a—it is a third-party certification, North American contractor certification on the small business owner's side. And then with the actual installer, it is an architectural glass and metal technician certification.

But you are seeing these specified in a lot more projects so that there is less rework, but also so that the design is—that is intended, especially when you are looking for energy reduction, is completed by—by a competent installer and contractor as well. So we are seeing the architects working on those tax credits with our contractors.

Ms. CHU. Thank you. I yield pack.

Chairman MOLINARO. Thank you, Ms. Chu.

We have gone through the first round of questions. We are going to actually just do a second round. I know Chairman Williams wanted to also ask a couple questions.

So without objection, we will begin a second round. We will make that relatively quick for all of you.

I will start with Ms. Gamba. Just—let's—we talked a little bit about the pieces of legislation that we have worked together on, the Think DIFFERENTLY About Disability Employment Act, the Think DIFFERENTLY Small Business Accessibility Act, really trying to get the federal government to partner and use the resources it has to assist organizations like your own.

If you had a magic wand, what would be the support or resources necessary to expand your workforce opportunity programming? Other than money, which, of course, we recognize is necessary.

Ms. GAMBA. I think that the onboarding process for many small businesses has to be more accessible. So I think if my—if I could use a magic wand, that would be it. I think a lot of the individuals that we support in our labor pool are often not able to pass the initial assessments or anything that pertain to online onboarding.

So I think that right now that would be my biggest barrier. And if that is something that I had a magic wand, I would fix.

Chairman MOLINARO. Terrific. Thanks very much.

Frank, just because you both come from my neck of the woods, what would you want folks at home to know about both the location of opportunities, apprenticeship language, and confront at least maybe one or two of the, how shall I say, perhaps—I don't want to say stigmas, but observations people have about sometimes employing the trades. How would you overcome some of those—some hesitance in the community and make those connections that would keep our friends employed?

Mr. STENTO. Okay.

Chairman MOLINARO. If you know what I am asking.

Mr. STENTO. I am. I think I am following.

So as far as—you know, we refer a lot of times not—discussing union labor, but local labor. So this is a smart way of our taxpayers to be spending their money.

For every dollar invested with our local union workforce in our surrounding areas, it is having a direct impact in the community and the taxpayer base that are funding these projects. So that would be one way that I would dissuade anyone who was hesitant in utilizing union workforce.

Back to the first part of the question discussing the tax incentives and subsidies, apprenticeship language, it makes sense. We are here talking about the lack of skilled personnel in our—in the workforce in various industries, specifically for me, construction.

So it would—to me, that would be a way to get more contractors hiring, putting apprentices on, boosting our ratios, so that we are flush with skilled workforce 5 to 8 years from now.

Chairman MOLINARO. I thank you, Frank.

That concludes my questions. I will yield the balance of my time. My colleagues physically to my right, metaphorically to my left, are going to pass, and we will acknowledge Chairman Williams for his 5 minutes.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And some of you may not know, but I played professional baseball for the Atlanta Braves. And notice I said some and not many of you would know. There is a difference. But I did play with the Atlanta Braves, and there is really nothing that brings people together like the America's pastime.

And, Ms. Gamba, I noticed that your organization, we talked about it this morning, partnered with the Legends of Yankee Stadium to help people with disabilities find meaningful employment. So my question is, what types of roles are these individuals performing at the historic Yankee Stadium, and are there other opportunities your organization is exploring?

Ms. GAMBA. So Legends operates concessions at Yankee Stadium. So the individuals that we—are placed in there are working in merchandising, retail, and food service primarily.

If we have any individuals that have a specific interest, such as maybe human resources, they have been open to putting them in internships in those sites as well.

Mr. WILLIAMS. A lot of opportunities.

Ms. GAMBA. And I would love to get into the Mets, but that—

Mr. WILLIAMS. Well, there is your Met man right there.

Ms. GAMBA. I know.

Mr. WILLIAMS. He is ready to make the deal. That is a great program.

Ms. GAMBA. Yep.

Mr. WILLIAMS. I think MLB is familiar with it, aren't they, Major League Baseball?

Ms. GAMBA. Well, our partnership is with Legends, so that is all I can speak to.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Yeah. But it could be some—it could grow. That is very good.

There has been a significant shortage in skilled labor across the country for way too long. And when I was secretary of state of Texas, we were always looking into infrastructure projects, but we kept running into the issue of finding enough welders and other skilled tradesmen to complete the projects. We actually lost a lot of business because we didn't have welders in Texas.

Mr. Stento, I have worked with different community colleges around my district to emphasize their trade school programs. And so how do you think we should be promoting these options to young people so we can build up the skilled workforce and let them know there is options out there other than being a lawyer or an architect or something?

Mr. STENTO. Thank you, Chairman Williams. I appreciate the question.

It is something that over the last 2 years I have spent a lot of time within our district council working on is increasing our branding and our awareness, and that doesn't happen with just one touch or one conversation with our youth. This has to happen early and it has to happen often.

I am talking about getting in and speaking with youth in elementary school or even earlier, and working with them over years bringing an identity to what we do in the trades, to the projects that we worked on in the community, to testimonials from those community members who would be able to speak to how these careers have helped transform their lives.

So early, often, and getting in before discussing with seniors in high school, who have already had time to make up their minds elsewhere.

Mr. WILLIAMS. We lose 100,000 kids a year in Texas. They are dropping out of the ninth grade. And those are the kids we need to reach out to and let them learn a trade and be very successful in the economy.

Mr. STENTO. I agree.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Yeah. Mr. Strange, I wanted to ask you a similar question. Can you talk about some of the work you are doing to try to get high schoolers who may not know what they want to do with their futures into the skilled workforce?

Mr. STRANGE. Absolutely. First off, real quick, I want to address the welding concern. We have seven training facilities that we have CWI certifications inside of and, therefore, provide the welding needs that are needed in our area. So if Texas is needing, we got them for you.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Tell them to call Governor Abbott.

Mr. STRANGE. So one of the ways—and we are actually in the season right now where we are doing this. We have open house

events. So we are currently—yesterday we hosted one at one of our facilities. We have another one to follow tomorrow.

As of right now, at five of our facilities to point this year, we have had over 2,500 high school students come through our facilities to be able to see and tour that. Along with that, we also do a program where we invite back those students that come, we invite their parents to come meet with us. We do an evening with them, and we tell them about the opportunity we have, the career options that we have for their kids—for their students to possibly enter into. We have actually even had some parents enroll in our program after they have come and seen who we are and what we do.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Well, that is great. You may—I am sure you have already touched on it, Mr. Chairman. But we have a bill that basically in simple terms makes the State colleges show these kids what it costs to go to a State university as opposed to a trade school. Big difference; affecting student debt and all the things we hear about that come from that. So we need to continue to do that.

I don't think the economy is complete until we have a workforce who is complete with trades. And we will never run out of that. So appreciate what you are doing.

I yield my time back.

Chairman MOLINARO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We appreciate that.

As a long-suffering Mets fan, if we never had to travel to Atlanta again, we would be much happier. Just saying.

With that, that concludes our round of questioning. I do want to thank all three of you for your testimony today and being here in Washington with us.

Again, as mentioned, clearly bipartisan, and this Committee does distinguish itself under Mr. Williams—Chairman Williams' leadership in acting in a bipartisan way.

So without objection, Members have 5 legislative days to submit additional materials and written questions for the witnesses to the Chair which will be forwarded to the witnesses.

The Ranking Member and I would love at the conclusion of the meeting just to take a quick photograph with our witnesses to show our continued support.

If you would, to any written requests, we would ask witnesses to promptly respond.

And if there is no other business to come before the Committee, without objection, the Committee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:56 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

WRITTEN STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

AVENUES TO SUCCESS: EXAMING WORKFORCE TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR EMPLOYEES

September 25, 2024

Ashley Gamba

Executive Director, Community Options New York, Inc

Dear Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velazquez and Members of the U.S. House Committee on Small Business:

As an Executive Director for Community Options New York Inc, I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide written testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Small Business regarding workforce training programs that are available to help small business owners expand their labor pool.

Community Options, Inc. is a nationally based nonprofit (IRS 501(c)(3) certified) organization incorporated in 1989 and headquartered in Princeton, NJ. Community Options believes in the dignity of every person, and in the freedom of all people to experience the highest degree of self-determination. Embracing this philosophy, Community Options provides housing and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Over the past year we supported over 5,000 people with disabilities, including 2,100 people receiving employment services, assisting them with developing the skills needed to obtain and maintain competitive, integrated employment.

Community Options, Inc has had the opportunity to develop innovative training programs in partnership with numerous businesses to assist with positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities across New York State. We have partnered with Legends at Yankee Stadium to provide hands-on integrated training in the following areas: Merchandising, Food Service, Customer Service and Retail. By providing work readiness training to assist participants with building the soft skills related to employment, hands-on experience to develop transferrable work skills, and onsite training and support, we have successfully placed over 200 individuals in paid work experiences that have resulted in 80% of placement in competitive employment settings.

Additionally, through a partnership with the NBA Foundation, Community Options has received funding to provide training and employment support to minority youth with disabilities across several states. This funding has enabled us to identify youth with disabilities and provide work readiness training, career exploration counseling, job placement, and job coaching services to this population. This couldn't be done without our small business partners; local businesses and organizations that have assisted with allowing us the opportunity to provide onsite training and job coaching services to the individuals that we support.

Most recently, we have had the opportunity to partner with CVS Health to provide retail, front/back store, supervisor training, and a Department of Labor funded pre-apprenticeship program for

Weston, B. (n.d.). Small businesses persevere despite hiring challenges. SCORE. <https://www.score.org/resource/blog-post/small-businesses-persevere-despite-hiring-challenges>

SHRM. (2023, December 12). SHRM Foundation, Entertainment Industry Foundation launch Partnership Promoting Inclusion in the Workplace. SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/about/press-room/shrm-foundation-entertainment-industry-foundation-launch-partnership-promoting-inclusion-workplace>

Pharmacy Technician Training. Through this partnership, we have had the opportunity to build a career readiness center offering hands-on training to further develop the transferable work skills required for competitive employment.

In our ever-evolving economy it has become apparent that hiring to meet the needs of many small businesses has proven to be difficult. In a recent survey conducted by SCORE, more than 50% of small businesses reported that it was very or somewhat difficult to fill open positions citing that it has been most problematic to find skilled or qualified workers. Additionally, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, approximately 97% of HR professionals and 92% of people managers say that employees with disabilities often perform at the same or better level than their coworkers without disabilities. Yet, this population often faces significant challenges when attempting to obtain meaningful employment.

As always, we are very thankful for our small business partners who work closely with our agency to provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. We encourage small businesses across the country to partner with local agencies to increase the availability and accessibility to training programs designed to train and develop the skills of this under-represented population. And we also urge congress to continue to strengthen funding for vocational and pre-apprenticeship opportunities for both youth and adults with disabilities.

Weston, B. (n.d.). Small businesses persevere despite hiring challenges. SCORE. <https://www.score.org/resource/blog-post/small-businesses-persevere-despite-hiring-challenges>

SHRM. (2023, December 12). SHRM Foundation, Entertainment Industry Foundation launch Partnership Promoting Inclusion in the Workplace. SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/about/press-room/shrm-foundation-entertainment-industry-foundation-launch-partnership-promoting-inclusion-workplace>

I have a great deal of gratitude for my organization the International Union of Painter's & Allied Trades, for the small business owners also known as subcontractors who employed me, for my instructors and journey workers that supported and trained me to become a skilled craftsman, and to my mentors that challenged me and took the time to help me develop. What do all the above have in common? The workforce model of a Registered Apprenticeship Program which has a rich history in the US and a bright future. Like many others before me this system provided me an opportunity, a purpose, and the tools to achieve success.

An apprenticeship in the skilled trades offers a unique opportunity to gain hands-on experience while earning a living. Unlike traditional classroom education, "earn while you learn" apprenticeships allow you to gain knowledge by working under the guidance of experienced professionals in the industry. Practical training ensures that you develop the technical skills necessary to excel in your chosen field, whether it's plumbing, electrical work, or the finishing trades. This leads to full-time employment, providing a clear path to a stable career without the burden of student loan debt. The other 4-year degree is what we commonly reference a registered apprenticeship program although the time frame depending on craft and curriculum can be anywhere from 3-5 years.

Beyond the technical skills, apprenticeships also foster personal development. They teach you how to work in real-world environments, solve problems on the spot, and communicate effectively on jobsites and beyond. These skills are invaluable across many areas of life and make apprentices highly sought after by employers. Furthermore, the demand for skilled tradespeople continues to grow, offering long-term job security and competitive wages. With an abundance of Mega projects on the horizon combined with a workforce that is aging there is an urgency to get new candidates in the pipeline to sustain the industry for those small business owners long term. An apprenticeship not only builds expertise but sets the foundation for a rewarding and sustainable career.

In apprenticeship school our instructors teach hands-on applications & best practices. There is a large component dedicated to health & safety to minimize accidents in the field. There are conversations around tools, equipment and technologies in the craft. Training around financial literacy, social skills, the history of the trade and advances in the industry are incorporated. We complete mockups in house for repetition in the craft and perform projects for nonprofits in the community. After apprenticeship school there is a focus on journeyworker upgrading as we have an obligation to maintain our reputation as the most highly skilled, safe and productive workforce performing our crafts. We have an online Learning Management System with hundreds of courses to choose from including blueprint reading, estimating essentials and project management. This helps w/ the retention of our workforce and the constant training makes those involved more employable. The way we have our apprenticeship setup is called block training which is 4 full weeks a year during the months of January through April. Some programs have night school where students come in after work hours. In areas where a Local or District Council like ours are spread out the block training is better suited. The rest of the apprenticeship is made up of OJT with our contractor partners.

A high paying and sustainable career with benefits in the construction field is the purpose of a registered apprenticeship program. With continued education & training

opportunities additional pathways can be accessed in the industry. Some of the best Foreman, Superintendents, Project Managers, Contractors, Safety Officers, Business Representatives, Instructors, Engineers were developed through field experience & an apprenticeship. I completed my apprenticeship in 2016, which is worth 40 college credits through an articulation agreement we have with Mountwest Community & Technical College, and then finished my associate's degree. I was running projects in the field and started instructing part time through our District Council which eventually led to a full-time staff position in August of 2018. Now one of the best parts of my career is seeing others come in and find similar success and watching their trajectory in life change. An apprenticeship program is a great way to start a career as well as a necessary system to continue the pipeline of skilled journey workers to business owners. Any opportunities that we have to increase apprenticeships will assist the challenges surrounding supply and demand that dominate recent conversation in the industry while simultaneously raising up those middle-class workers.

Testimony for the Record
Submitted to the
Committee on Small Business
Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development
for the Hearing
“Avenues to Success: Examining Workforce Training Programs for Employees”
Wednesday, September 25, 2024

Neal Strange
Director of Education
Indiana Kentucky Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters
Joint Apprenticeship and Training Fund

Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velazquez, and Members of the Committee – Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Neal Strange, and I am Director of Education for the Indiana Kentucky Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship and Training Fund, as well as a 15-year member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. I’m here to provide an overview of our Apprenticeship Program and the continuing education we offer to our members. This program is not just about learning a trade – it’s about ensuring our members are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in an ever-changing industry.

Our council consists of 38,000 members within Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio, and 550,000 members across the United States and Canada. We represent the carpenters, millwrights, piledrivers, and floor layers who are building our country’s bridges, highways, manufacturing sites, hospitals, schools, and power production facilities. On any given project, our members are responsible for approximately 50% of the total construction work, including concrete, structural walls, metal framing, roofing, and the installation of machinery.

At the core of our training philosophy is the belief that our contractors must remain relevant and prepared for both existing and emerging construction markets. To achieve this, we partner closely with contractors, manufacturers, and local universities to meet their specific needs. Together, we provide a robust training curriculum that emphasizes both productivity and safety, ensuring that our members deliver a high-quality product on every job.

One of the greatest strengths of our program is that all training is provided at no cost to our individual members. Funding for our program comes from contributions made for every hour worked on a job site by our signatory contractors. Nevertheless, we lift the financial burden off those contractors, allowing them to focus on project execution

without worrying about additional expenses related to training workers and ensuring their workforce has the proper certifications necessary for specific jobs. Our members benefit from a top-tier education, while our contractors benefit from a highly skilled workforce.

In terms of compensation, our apprentices are paid on a scaled wage basis. The wage structure provides apprentices with fair compensation as they build their skills, which further incentivizes retention and productivity. This model also allows our contractors to remain competitive in the market while employing highly trained and motivated workers.

We offer multiple pathways into our program, creating accessibility for a diverse group of candidates. We have partnerships with high school career and technical education programs, adult education initiatives, state and county reentry programs, and military veteran organizations – such as Helmets to Hardhats and our own internal Military Veterans Program. These pathways ensure that we are tapping into a wide range of talent, allowing for diversity and inclusion in our workforce.

In the past four years, our apprenticeship enrollment has grown by 40%, reflecting both the demand for skilled labor and also the increasing awareness of the opportunities our program offers for career growth and development. Current enrollment across our three states totals more than 6,900 apprentices. This includes 22% minority enrollment and 6% female enrollment.

From the moment an apprentice enters our program, safety becomes an integral part of their education. Beginning with OSHA 10 certification and continuing throughout their apprenticeship, safety protocols are embedded into every aspect of training. A safe worker is an effective worker, and this foundation is key to the longevity of their career and the protection of our job sites.

For members who aspire to advance further in their careers beyond the apprenticeship, we offer additional pathways into leadership roles, project management, and business ownership. Whether a member seeks to move into superintendent or management positions, or has an entrepreneurial spirit and wishes to start their own contracting business, our continuing education resources equip them with the skills and confidence to succeed. We recognize the importance of nurturing leadership from within, and our specialized programs allow our members to thrive in roles that require strategic thinking and operational oversight.

Our program's reach extends beyond training the individual. We play a crucial role in economic development by placing our skilled workers on jobs that span from small business ventures to large-scale, national projects. For smaller contractors looking to explore new markets, we provide access to a pool of well-trained workers who can meet

the demands of these new opportunities. Meanwhile, larger contractors – particularly those involved in mega-projects related to the CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act – also benefit from our training programs. Since 2023, more than 4,500 members within our three-state council have been employed in projects stemming from these acts, including Intel, Ford Blue Oval, and numerous renewable energy projects, covering solar, hydro and wind. These initiatives require a workforce that is both large and highly skilled, which our program delivers.

One of the challenges our small business contractors face is providing adequate support to their workforce, particularly in areas such as travel and childcare. These can significantly impact both employee retention and job satisfaction. The costs and logistics of supporting employees who must travel for work – a necessity in the construction industry – are a burden. A program or initiative that offers financial support or logistical assistance for employee travel would be immensely beneficial. This could come in the form of subsidized travel, tax credits, or even grants that alleviate the financial strain on the business.

Similarly, childcare assistance is a growing concern, especially as more parents are part of the workforce. Small contractors often cannot afford to provide the same level of benefits as larger corporations, putting them at a disadvantage when competing for skilled labor. Childcare support could take various forms, including direct subsidies, partnerships with childcare providers, or flexible childcare solutions like on-site care or tax incentives for companies offering such benefits.

Since our inception in 1881, the UBC has organized the membership necessary to meet contractor and end user needs. Our privately funded training keeps us ahead of the curve. We understand that if our signatory contractors are not successful, we will not be successful. We have no seniority in our Collective Bargaining Agreements and no contractor is bound to employ a member they find unproductive. This competitive environment is necessary for our success. All this is done at no cost to the taxpayer.

In summary, our Apprenticeship Program and continuing education initiatives are designed to support both our members and the contractors they serve. We provide cost-free, high-quality training that focuses on safety, competitiveness, career advancement, and long-term development. By doing so, we help drive economic growth, foster innovation, and build a workforce that is ready to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Thank you for your time. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.



September 25, 2024

The Honorable Marc Molinaro
Chair
House Committee on Small Business
Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship
and Workforce Development
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Morgan McGarvey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Small Business
Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship
and Workforce Development
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Molinaro, Ranking Member McGarvey and Members of the House Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Workforce Development:

On behalf of Associated Builders and Contractors, a national construction industry trade association with 67 chapters representing more than 23,000 members, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the subcommittee's hearing, "[Avenues to Success: Examining Workforce Training Programs for Employees](#)." The majority of ABC's general contractor and subcontractor members qualify as small businesses as defined by the Small Business Administration. The industry consistently has one of the highest concentrations of small business participation and its members play an integral role in building America's infrastructure.

On Jan. 31, ABC's construction workforce shortage model [found](#) the construction industry needs to attract an additional 501,000 workers on top of the normal pace of hiring in 2024 to meet the demand for labor. Fortunately, apprenticeship and career technical education programs, such as ABC's, are equipping workers with the tools necessary to build America's infrastructure. Notably, ABC chapters operate more than 450 government-registered apprenticeship programs in over 210 construction industry trades to provide workers with transferable and durable skill sets.

Relevant to the chairman, ABC's Empire State chapter maintains six New York offices and operates a state-registered Multiple Employer Apprenticeship Program. ABC Empire State's program provides learners with a dynamic learning experience that seamlessly blends hands-on training with classroom instruction. Together, these two components allow workers to earn wages while acquiring practical, real-world experience. The chapter offers this New York state-approved curriculum at four centers, where industry-trained professionals provide instruction on nine different trades. Notably, the program allows businesses to access skilled workers ready to excel in their chosen trades while eliminating the administrative and compliance-related burdens associated with New York apprenticeship programs.

While New York businesses may access ABC's Multiple Employer Apprenticeship Program, non-union businesses are placed at a disadvantage elsewhere. Specifically, New York Workforce Investment Boards discriminate against businesses not associated with organized labor by refusing to fund hundreds of community groups and thousands of individual businesses. This gatekeeping of workforce development dollars sidelines workers and prevents tax dollars from supporting New York businesses.

ABC opposes schemes that discourage participation and tilt the playing field in favor of organized labor. Instead, ABC supports an all-of-the-above approach to workforce development that ensures federal dollars are allocated to all organizations investing in workforce development programs. For this reason, ABC is proud to [support H.R. 6655](#), A Stronger Workforce for America Act. This legislation reauthorizes the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and includes employer-led and on-the-job workforce upskilling programs and opportunities. ABC commended the U.S. House of Representatives for passing the legislation by a [378-26](#) vote on April 9.

Disappointingly, the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee has yet to advance H.R. 6655. What's worse, the Committee is supporting its own WIOA proposal that disregards the bipartisan nature of WIOA and the House bill. The Senate HELP Committee's proposal includes several concerning provisions that create an unfair playing field. Specifically, it exempts labor unions from having to achieve rigorous new eligibility requirements while automatically recognizing unions on a new list of Workforce Innovation Leaders. Additionally, the proposal undermines the ability of employers to engage with the program through a blacklisting amendment that would result in employers with allegations of labor law violations being denied access to the WIOA program

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and funding, despite the employers still having opportunities to appeal the allegations. ABC opposes the Senate's WIOA proposal and H.R. 2851, the National Apprenticeship Act of 2023, which would restrict small businesses' ability to access federally registered apprenticeship programs, limit job opportunities in the construction industry and create additional obstacles for the industry to meet future workforce demand and needs.

ABC supports an all-of-the-above workforce development strategy, including industry-driven and government-registered apprenticeship programs, so that workers and employers have the freedom to choose the best way to provide value and help build and rebuild America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristen Swearingen".

Kristen Swearingen
Vice President, Legislative & Political Affairs

Testimony by

Lisanne McNew, President & CEO, SAFE Engineering in Monument, Colorado, Past Board Chair, Pikes Peak Workforce Development Board, Immediate Past Chair, Colorado Workforce Development Council, and Board Chair, National Association of Workforce Boards

**to the House Small Business Committee
Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development
U.S. House of Representatives**

September 25, 2024

My name is Lisanne McNew, and I am the owner and CEO of SAFE Engineering in Monument, Colorado. Additionally, I serve as the Board Chair of the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB), Immediate Past Chair of the Colorado Workforce Development Council, and Past Board Chair of the Pikes Peak Workforce Development Board in Colorado Springs.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify about the vital role of small businesses in workforce development and the support provided by workforce boards.

In Colorado, the Pikes Peak Workforce Development Board and our Workforce Center connect businesses with work-ready job seekers and employer-driven services. We assist residents of El Paso and Teller Counties in navigating career transitions, whether they are unemployed, underemployed, or facing other barriers. Our clients range from entry-level to professional, including youth, adults, returning workers, and those overcoming employment challenges. We offer job search and training opportunities, including 20 free job seeker workshops annually, as well as the largest virtual and in-person job fairs in Southern Colorado.

I'd like to share a few key initiatives highlighting our collaboration in small business development:

- **Incumbent Worker Training (IWT):** We actively engage with Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) to promote our programs, including the popular IWT (Employee Development Fund). Recently, five childcare businesses collaborated with an SBDC to apply for IWT grants, resulting in three businesses receiving \$15,157 to upskill 38 employees—crucial for sustaining our local childcare workforce. With more resources, workforce boards could expand these efforts significantly.
- **Veterans:** We participate in SBDC's Veterans Conference to assist veteran-owned businesses in attracting and retaining talent. We provide guidance on skills-based

hiring, job descriptions, and other support to help them grow. Our Workforce Development Board is proud of this commitment.

- **Cybersecurity:** As cybersecurity becomes increasingly critical for business success, we connect small businesses with high-quality training and resources. We are developing specific training on cybersecurity best practices for small businesses and regularly participate in cybersecurity initiatives to link workers with employers in this vital sector.

The potential for greater integration between workforce boards and small businesses is significant. Earlier this year, NAWB and the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) signed a [Strategic Alliance Memorandum \(SAM\)](#) to enhance collaboration and resource access.

The SBA is an ideal partner for NAWB, representing nearly 600 Workforce Development Boards that collaborate with education and economic development stakeholders to deliver regional workforce programs tailored to job seekers, businesses, and communities. Workforce boards manage over 2,300 American Job Centers and partner with various organizations to serve both businesses and job seekers effectively.

By providing SBA-sponsored assistance through its resource partners, we can better address the challenges of training and support services for small businesses, increasing awareness of available resources.

I hope my testimony illustrates the opportunities for workforce boards to bolster small businesses. Thank you for allowing me to share these insights with the Subcommittee.