



June 15, 2018

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative,

On behalf of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), a national construction industry trade association with 70 chapters representing more than 21,000 members, I write today in support of H.R. 4508, the *PROSPER Act*, introduced by Education and Workforce Committee Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.).

The *PROSPER Act* contains many beneficial updates to the *Higher Education Act*, including strengthening workforce development and encouraging learning that results in family-sustaining job opportunities. ABC is particularly supportive of the many provisions that encourage students to pursue their learning at baccalaureate institutions as well as earn-and-learn, skills-based job readiness programs. Chairwoman Foxx, like millions of job seekers and job creators, recognizes that students can achieve the American dream through apprenticeships and other earn-and-learn education programs.

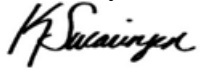
Currently, there are approximately 500,000 open positions for construction professionals. Nationwide, our economy faces a shortage of six million skilled workers. These glaring statistics represent a call to action: We must do a better job of promoting careers in the skilled trades and encourage our students, parents and guidance counselors to put jobs obtained by baccalaureate degrees on a level playing field with jobs obtained through skills-based education. The *PROSPER Act* addresses this, and would help fill our skills gap by expanding opportunities for industry-recognized apprenticeships, which make up the majority of skills education taught in the construction industry.

The *PROSPER Act* also recognizes how the market is delivering education today. By updating a decades-old system, students who participate in industry-led, competency-based programs will now be eligible to receive Pell Grants. In construction, condensed, competency-based education programs allow a student to access a safety-focused introductory learning course and learn the job-ready skills that are most valuable to the student and the company that hires them. The student, now a worker, can then build upon their knowledge by learning more skills and obtaining nationally portable credentials. Offering Pell Grants to students who enroll in these types of programs will not only help young people launch rewarding careers, but also send a signal to all Americans that skills-based education and jobs are equal to their university counterparts.

ABC is also optimistic about the partnerships that the *PROSPER Act* would encourage between education and industry. It is vital that this partnership be especially robust when shaping curriculum, with the goal that students in all programs are being taught skills that ensure career success.

We thank Chairwoman Foxx once again for her leadership on the *PROSPER Act*. We encourage all members of the House of Representatives to support this legislation to help give all Americans the opportunity to build their future and build America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K Swearingen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of the first name being a large, stylized capital letter.

Kristen Swearingen

Vice President of Legislative & Political Affairs