

**Written Statement of Natasha Sherwood
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**Before the U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development**

“Workforce Rewired: Modern Apprenticeships for a Modern Economy”

June 24, 2026

Chairman Owens, Ranking Member Adams, and Members of the Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the critical role that Registered Apprenticeship programs play in preparing the workforce needed to power America's modern economy.

My name is Natasha Sherwood, and I serve as the Workforce Development Director for the Independent Electrical Contractors (IEC), a national trade association representing more than 4,200 merit shop electrical contracting firms¹ and 54 local IEC chapters across the United States.

Since its founding in 1957, IEC has been a leader in workforce development, helping electrical contractors recruit, train, and retain the skilled workforce needed to build and maintain the infrastructure that powers our nation. In 2026, more than 22,000 apprentices are enrolled in IEC's Registered Apprenticeship programs.²

Throughout my 30-year career I have witnessed the benefits of the Registered Apprenticeship system for learners, contractors, program providers, and society.³ Its rigorous earn-while-you-learn model allows apprentices to master a trade, avoid college debt, and provides a critical pipeline into a rewarding construction industry career with opportunity ladders of merit-based wage progression, professional and leadership growth, and entrepreneurship.

In short, apprenticeship transforms lives, and the modern economy relies on a pipeline of skilled trades and experienced contractors to build and power America.

However, more needs to be done by the private and public sector to promote careers in the skilled trades and the benefits of the apprenticeship system. Likewise, improvements to government policy on apprenticeship and workforce development would benefit the public interest and ecosystem of apprenticeship stakeholders.

Today, I would like to discuss three important points:

1. America cannot achieve its infrastructure, energy, manufacturing, housing, and artificial intelligence goals without significantly expanding its skilled workforce.
2. Registered Apprenticeship provides a proven, scalable, and debt-free pathway to prepare workers for these high-demand careers.

¹ More than four out of every five electrical contracting businesses in America operate as merit shop companies and account for approximately 81% of the electrical contractor market, representing an estimated \$232 billion in annual industry revenue. Merit shop contractors employ nearly three-quarters of the electrical contracting workforce. Learn more at <https://ieci.org/workforce/research/>.

² IEC reported 21,605 active apprentices in 2025, representing 32% of the merit shop apprenticeship market and 15% of all electrician apprentices nationwide. See *Economic Impact of Merit Shop Electrical Contractors*, page 18, Active Electrician Apprentices by Affiliation, 2025, available at <https://ieci.org/workforce/research/>.

³ See examples in *Sharing Perspectives on the Value of Apprenticeship*, IEC, May 20, 2026: <https://ieci.org/sharing-perspectives-on-the-value-of-apprenticeship/>.

3. Congress, federal agencies, and state governments can help grow apprenticeship by supporting employer-led programs, encouraging innovation, and reducing barriers that limit participation.

I. The Workforce Challenge Facing America

America is experiencing a significant workforce shortage across many industries at a time when demand for skilled labor remains exceptionally strong.

Across the country, employers are struggling to find qualified workers. This challenge is particularly acute in the skilled trades, where demographic trends, retirements, as well as underinvestment in career and technical education have reduced the pipeline of new workers entering the workforce.

At the same time, private-sector growth and government spending are driving strong demand for skilled electricians and other construction trades.

America is building new semiconductor manufacturing facilities, expanding broadband infrastructure, improving the electric grid, constructing advanced manufacturing facilities, electrifying transportation systems, and increasing domestic energy production to support this modern infrastructure and power homes, businesses, schools, and hospitals.

Perhaps nowhere is this demand more visible than in the explosive growth of artificial intelligence and the data center infrastructure required to support it. Total private sector spending on data center construction stood at \$50 billion in April 2026, surpassing public sector spending on transportation infrastructure. Data center construction accounts for 2.3% of all U.S. construction spending and is up 29.1% over last year. This massive private investment is welcome relief for many contractors as private nonresidential construction spending is otherwise sluggish. It has fallen for seven consecutive months and is down nearly 8% from December 2023's all-time high.⁴

To wire and power America, we first need enough electricians to do it. To keep pace with industry demand, America needs an estimated 80,000 net new electricians every year over the next decade,⁵ while the broader construction industry must attract and upskill nearly 350,000 workers in 2026 alone.⁶

II. IEC's Role in Developing America's Electrical Workforce

IEC has spent decades addressing this challenge by championing U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Registered Apprenticeship, collaborating with the U.S. DOL and State Apprenticeship Agencies (SAAs),⁷ and supporting other talent recruitment and workforce development pathways within the construction industry in communities across America.

⁴ *Nonresidential Construction Spending Grows on Public Sector Strength in April*, June 1, 2026, <https://www.abc.org/News-Media/News-Releases/abc-nonresidential-construction-spending-grows-on-public-sector-strength-in-april>.

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Electricians, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/construction-and-extraction/electricians.htm> (visited June 22, 2026).

⁶ *Construction Industry Must Attract 349,000 Workers in 2026 Despite Macroeconomic Headwinds*, 1/15/26, <https://www.abc.org/News-Media/News-Releases/abc-construction-industry-must-attract-349000-workers-in-2026-despite-macroeconomic-headwinds>

⁷ IEC has worked collaboratively with the U.S. DOL to expand awareness of apprenticeship, strengthen partnerships, and share best practices that help grow the registered apprenticeship system nationwide. IEC leadership supported the National Apprenticeship Week

Today, IEC’s network of more than 50 chapters and their training centers deliver employer-driven U.S. DOL Registered Apprenticeship programs that combine cutting-edge classroom instruction, known as Related Technical Instruction (RTI), with structured On-the-Job-Training (OJT) provided by employers.⁸

Registered Apprenticeship programs meet federal and state government standards, oversight, reporting, and skill and safety curricula requirements. Apprentices earn wages from their first day on the job and receive progressive wage increases while developing valuable skills under the supervision of experienced professionals. Graduates of these four-year programs earn a nationally recognized credential and become journeyman electricians, positioning them for family-sustaining wages, strong benefits, and long-term career opportunities.

Following apprenticeship program completion, participants can earn additional credentials, certifications, college degrees,⁹ and can command even higher compensation as foremen, supervisors, senior company executives, and business owners as they progress through their careers.

Today, IEC and its chapters educate more than 22,000 active electrical apprentices nationwide. Last year, IEC’s apprentices represented approximately 32% of all merit shop electrical apprentices and 15% of all electrical apprentices in the United States.¹⁰

IEC apprenticeship programs serve contractors and apprentices in urban, suburban, and rural communities across the country represented by Republican and Democratic members of this committee and Congress.

(NAW) 2026 by serving on the DOL’s kickoff webinar, providing technical assistance and ideas to other organizations on developing impactful education, and participating in events across the country. During NAW 2026 activities in Washington, D.C., the DOL publicly recognized IEC’s significant contributions in helping drive record participation and events.

Beyond NAW, IEC has partnered with the DOL and SAAs by presenting at national and regional convenings—including events in the Southeast—on topics such as group sponsorship, the role of associations in expanding apprenticeship, and innovative approaches to pre-apprenticeship. Through these engagements, IEC has shared practical strategies with employers, workforce organizations, and education partners seeking to launch or scale registered apprenticeship programs.

IEC has also worked collaboratively with DOL staff and stakeholders to strengthen pre-apprenticeship pathways, improve transitions into registered apprenticeship, and explore ways workforce education, credentialing, and local educational agencies can better align with apprenticeship models. This includes identifying approaches that fit within academic calendars and shorter instructional periods while maintaining the quality and rigor employers expect.

Our philosophy is simple: apprenticeship grows fastest when government, education, and industry work together. IEC appreciates the DOL’s partnership and remain committed to sharing what has worked so that more employers, more apprentices, and more communities can benefit from high-quality registered apprenticeship opportunities.

⁸ In typical construction industry “earn-while-you-learn” Registered Apprenticeship programs, a minimum of 144 hours of RTI is recommended for every 2,000 hours of OJT. This standard is established through federal regulations governing apprenticeship, specifically under [29 CFR Part 29](https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/bulletins/2026-01%20Registered%20Apprenticeship%20Training%20Approaches.pdf) (Labor Standards for the Registration of Apprenticeship Programs). See also

<https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/bulletins/2026-01%20Registered%20Apprenticeship%20Training%20Approaches.pdf>

⁹ IEC’s partnership with the American Council on Education’s College Credit Recommendation Service (ACE CREDIT®) ensures that apprentices receive college credit for each year of their four-year training program, up to 57 total credit hours. This benefit makes earning a college degree more affordable, and it supports IEC’s belief in the importance of lifelong learning. Learn more at

<https://ieci.org/apprenticeship-old/ace-college-program/>.

¹⁰ See *Economic Impact of Merit Shop Electrical Contractors*, page 18, Active Electrician Apprentices by Affiliation, 2025, available at <https://ieci.org/workforce/research/>. According to the report, approximately 135,000 electrician apprentices are currently enrolled nationwide. Merit shop programs account for roughly half of all electrical apprentices and approximately two-thirds of new electrician apprentices entering the profession.

IEC member contractors are overwhelmingly small businesses and benefit from a strong Registered Apprenticeship system to develop talent. Nearly 90% of IEC member contractors employ fewer than 100 workers,¹¹ which is consistent with the U.S. Census Bureau's findings that the construction industry has one of the highest concentrations of small businesses.¹² Small and large IEC contractors collaborate with project owners and general contractors to deliver a project safely, on time and on budget. All rely on an abundant, skilled and safe workforce.

Registered Apprenticeship has proven successful because it aligns the interests of workers, employers, and taxpayers.

Apprentices avoid the significant debt burdens often associated with other higher education models while gaining practical experience and entering high-demand careers.

IEC contractors invest in the apprenticeship system because it is where they cultivate talent, provide mentorship, and develop safe and productive workers so they can win more contracts, grow their companies, and hire more talent from their communities.

Taxpayers benefit from a workforce system that is closely connected to labor market demand and produces measurable employment outcomes.

III. Workforce Development Needs More Support

Regrettably, today's construction industry Registered Apprenticeship system is not keeping up with industry demand.

IEC's analysis¹³ of apprenticeship data from the U.S. Department of Labor¹⁴ shows that construction industry Registered Apprenticeship programs had approximately 313,000 to 336,000 active apprentices in FY2025, and produced an estimated 38,000 to 43,000 completers of four-to-five-year Registered Apprenticeship programs.

Unfortunately, with the construction industry facing a skilled labor shortage of nearly 350,000 this year and 450,000 projected for 2027, that means America's apprenticeship system is producing between 10% and 13% of the journeymen needed each year to meet industry demand for labor.

The reasons for this shortfall in the construction industry and other industries are numerous and nuanced. As discussed further in my testimony, more can be done through government policy to make

¹¹ See *Economic Impact of Merit Shop Electrical Contractors*, page 82, available at <https://ieci.org/workforce/research/>.

¹² 82% of all construction firms have fewer than 10 employees; see CB2300CBP, 2023: ECNSVY Business Patterns County Business Patterns <https://data.census.gov/table?q=CBP2023.CB2300CBP&codeset=naics~23>. 99% of all construction firms have fewer than 100 employees and account for 68.4% of all industry employment; see <https://data.census.gov/table?q=CBP2023.CB2300CBP&codeset=naics~23>. Likewise, the U.S. *Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy Small Business Profile (2025)* found that 80.7% of the construction industry is employed by small businesses; see page 4, https://advocacy.sba.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/United_States_2025-State-Profile.pdf.

¹³ *Merit Shop Apprenticeship Growth Accelerates, but Construction Workforce Gap Persists*, April 13, 2026, <https://ieci.org/merit-shop-apprenticeship-growth-accelerates-but-construction-workforce-gap-persists/>

¹⁴ Raw data provided by U.S. DOL to IEC on March 24, 2026. Calculations and analysis by IEC available at: <https://ieci.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/IEC-Analysis-of-DOL-ETA-Data-For-Construction-Industry-Apprenticeship-Programs-FY19-FY25-Draft-Updated-040726.xlsx>

the apprenticeship system more attractive for all employers, learners, and providers, and help achieve the Trump administration's goal of creating 1 million new apprentices.¹⁵

Encouragingly, DOL data indicates a 31.5% increase in construction industry apprenticeship program participants, a 26.9% increase in apprenticeship completers, and 16.46% more apprenticeship programs from FY2020 to FY2025.

IV. Apprenticeship Is Modernizing to Meet the Moment

When talking about modern apprenticeships for our modern economy, people often ask how IEC is preparing for an economy dominated by artificial intelligence.

My answer is simple: While apprenticeship is rooted in a long tradition of workforce development, today's programs are increasingly innovative and technology-driven.

Modern apprentices utilize online learning platforms, virtual jobsite environment simulations, digital assessments, and mobile learning applications. These innovations improve accessibility, increase flexibility, and enhance learning outcomes while maintaining rigorous standards.

Technology-enabled instruction is particularly important for reaching workers in rural communities, supporting working adults, and helping employers scale training capacity in the face of significant labor shortages across the skilled trades.

IEC is innovating to prepare more Americans for modern careers that cannot be outsourced and still require human skill. Specifically, IEC is:

- Implementing career matching tools that align individuals' aptitudes with careers.
- Using personalized AI tutoring that scaffolds the curriculum for struggling readers and translates it into more than 200 languages.
- Expanding synchronous and asynchronous online instruction so geography and work schedules don't become barriers to program completion.
- Utilizing immersive simulation technologies to allow apprentices to safely practice complex skills before performing them on a jobsite.

But no amount of technology replaces real-world experience. Apprentices still master their trade the way they always have—by learning from skilled professionals while earning a paycheck on the jobsite.

Our greatest innovation, however, is not technology. It's our proven and reliable group sponsorship model.

Group sponsorship empowers our contractors and chapters to grow by leveraging nationally developed curriculum and shared best practices, so even small employers can participate in apprenticeship.

¹⁵ United States, Executive Office of the President [Donald Trump]. Executive Order 14278: Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future. 23 Apr. 2025. *Federal Register*, vol. 90, no. 81, 28 Apr. 2025, pp. 17525-17527.
<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/28/2025-07369/preparing-americans-for-high-paying-skilled-trade-jobs-of-the-future>

Policymakers should encourage innovation while preserving the core elements that make apprenticeship successful: employer engagement, paid work-based learning, industry-recognized credentials, strong and reasonable accountability measures, and rigorous on-the-job learning.

V. IEC Policy Recommendations to Strengthen Apprenticeship and Workforce Development Systems

Based on IEC's experience developing the nation's electrical workforce, I respectfully offer the following recommendations for Congress and federal regulators.

1. Preserve the employer-led nature of Registered Apprenticeship.

Employers are best positioned to identify workforce needs, establish training standards, and ensure apprentices acquire skills that align with labor market demand. Policymakers should preserve this essential connection between training and employment and avoid unnecessary bureaucratic requirements that can weaken the employer-led nature of apprenticeship.¹⁶ If government policies make employer participation in the apprenticeship system overly burdensome or inefficient, employer participation will decline and apprenticeship growth will suffer. Likewise, if learners don't find value in programs and receive the skills needed to fill jobs needed by contractors because training priorities become disconnected from the needs of employers and industry, the system will fail. However, a balance needs to be struck to preserve the integrity and consistency of apprenticeship programs. Finding the appropriate balance can be challenging given the bureaucratic and political dynamics within the apprenticeship ecosystem.

2. Support all Registered Apprenticeship providers equally.

The apprenticeship system is strongest when employers, associations, educational institutions, labor organizations, and other sponsors voluntarily participate—as intended under the National Apprenticeship Act—and do so on a level playing field. Registered Apprenticeship policies must consistently support high-quality programs regardless of sponsorship model.

Unfortunately, IEC chapters and members report that in some states, including Nevada, Oregon, and Washington, the approval process for new construction Registered Apprenticeship programs includes a "needs" test and/or an equal wages policy. Both policies can make it difficult—or even impossible—to enter the system.¹⁷ These troubling policies can delay or discourage the creation of additional apprenticeship opportunities at a time when employers across the country are facing significant workforce shortages.

¹⁶ For examples of provisions that IEC believed would have imposed significant burdens on apprenticeship sponsors and employers, see 45 pages of comments IEC submitted in response to the Biden U.S. DOL's controversial [proposed rule](https://www.regulations.gov/comment/ETA-2023-0004-2095), National Apprenticeship System Enhancements (RIN 1205-AC14) at <https://www.regulations.gov/comment/ETA-2023-0004-2095>. IEC urged the DOL to withdraw its misguided proposed rule, which the Biden administration eventually withdrew November 27, 2024, <https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eoDetails?rrid=571761>

¹⁷ See examples of artificial restrictions on Registered Apprenticeship program providers on page 20 of comments filed by the Associated Builders and Contractors on the Biden apprenticeship rule: https://www.abc.org/Portals/1/ABC_DOL_National%20Apprenticeship%20System%20Enhancements_3.18.2024.pdf#page=20.

IEC believes that government workforce policy should expand opportunities rather than limit them. Government policies should ensure that every qualified contractor, apprentice, and apprenticeship sponsor can contribute to building and maintaining our nation's energy and infrastructure needs.

For these reasons, IEC is particularly concerned about government-mandated Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) on federal and federally assisted construction projects. While intended to establish project-specific labor frameworks, PLA mandates can limit opportunities for many merit shop contractors and the apprentices they have invested in training through federally recognized Registered Apprenticeship programs. Because the overwhelming majority of the U.S. construction workforce works for employers that are not subject to collective bargaining agreements,¹⁸ policies that restrict robust and open competition from all qualified contractors can reduce the number of apprenticeship opportunities available on taxpayer-funded projects and limit workforce capacity at a time when the nation urgently needs more skilled electricians and construction professionals.

According to U.S. DOL data, growth in merit shop construction apprenticeship programs, participants, and completers—key metrics evaluating the workforce pipeline served by the Registered Apprenticeship system—is accelerating at a significantly faster rate than joint labor programs.¹⁹ Since 2020, the number of merit shop apprenticeship programs grew by 40.3% compared to a decline of 11.3% in the number of joint programs.

In addition, since 2020, the number of merit shop apprentices participating in construction apprenticeship programs grew by more than 60%, compared to roughly 20% growth in joint labor apprenticeship program participation. Likewise, merit shop programs experienced a 48% growth in the number of completers since 2020, while joint program completers increased by 21.7%

Policies that limit merit shop contractors' ability to utilize their existing workforce and registered apprentices risk reducing competition and constraining an already limited talent pipeline at a time when the nation urgently needs more skilled workers.

IEC supports policies that promote fair and open competition and maximize participation from all qualified contractors and apprenticeship sponsors and participants. This includes support for the Fair and Open Competition Act (H.R. 2126/S.1064),²⁰ which would allow government agencies to evaluate bids without requiring controversial PLAs²¹ as a condition of participation on federal and federally assisted construction projects.²²

¹⁸ *Merit Shop Construction Workforce Reaches Record-High*, March 9, 2026, <https://ieci.org/merit-shop-construction-workforce-reaches-record-high/>

¹⁹ *Merit Shop Apprenticeship Growth Accelerates, but Construction Workforce Gap Persists*, April 13, 2026, <https://ieci.org/merit-shop-apprenticeship-growth-accelerates-but-construction-workforce-gap-persists/>.

²⁰ H.R. 2126/S.1064 available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/2126> and <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/1064>.

²¹ Learn more about government-mandated PLAs via the Build America Local coalition website at www.buildamericainlocal.com

²² In addition, IEC opposes President Joe Biden's Executive Order 14063 and related regulations and policy that mandates PLAs on federal construction projects of \$35 million or more, and encourages PLAs on federally assisted projects. IEC believes these policies increase costs, reduce competition, and constrain workforce participation on federal construction projects across both administrations. Challenges to these policies continue to make their way through lengthy and expensive court proceedings. Learn more at *IEC Continues Advocacy for*

IEC's support for the Fair and Open Competition Act ensures that federal government policy does not favor one apprenticeship model over another. Joint and merit shop apprenticeship programs both play important roles in preparing America's workforce. Rather, IEC believes federal policy should support every high-quality registered apprenticeship program to help address the nation's growing labor shortages and should avoid unnecessarily restricting opportunities for apprentices to earn, learn, and contribute to their communities.

In FY 2025, the construction industry composed 38% to 48% of the nation's roughly 700,000 Registered Apprentices across all industries. As policymakers look to expand the total number of apprentices—including efforts by the Trump administration to reach its goal of creating 1 million new apprentices—the path to achieving that goal runs directly through the construction industry.

For these reasons, IEC is supportive of recent sub-regulatory guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration's Office of Apprenticeship that seeks to encourage innovation within the apprenticeship system and hold State Apprenticeship Agencies accountable when they improperly deny or delay program approvals.²³

Likewise, IEC encourages Congress to pass the [Streamlining Timely Apprenticeship Registration and Transparency \(START\) Act](#) (S. 4409),²⁴ which would establish deadlines requiring state apprenticeship agencies to approve or deny complete apprenticeship applications within 90 days and respond to incomplete applications within 30 days. The legislation would also establish accountability measures for agencies that fail to meet those timelines.

3. Increase apprenticeship capacity by addressing apprenticeship ratio bottlenecks.

IEC chapters and industry apprenticeship sponsors frequently hear from employers that participation in apprenticeship programs is often constrained by outdated apprentice-to-journeyworker ratio requirements that limit the number of apprentices who can be trained on a jobsite by a contractor with a small number of employees. These requirements vary by state and can unnecessarily restrict apprenticeship growth.²⁵

Many IEC small business contractors state that they would be more likely to engage in the Registered Apprenticeship system if restrictive ratios were eliminated or relaxed. IEC is not advocating for the elimination of apprentice-to-journeyworker ratios or for compromising safety or training quality. Rather, policymakers should review existing ratio requirements to ensure they are evidence-based, appropriately calibrated to modern industry practices, and designed to expand—not unnecessarily limit—opportunities

Fair and Open Competition as PLA Litigation Develops, May 11, 2026, <https://ieci.org/iec-continues-advocacy-for-fair-and-open-competition-as-pla-litigation-develops/>.

²³ *DOL Issues New Apprenticeship Guidance: What It Means for IEC and the Industry*, April 14, 2026, <https://ieci.org/dol-issues-new-apprenticeship-guidance-what-it-means-for-iec-and-the-industry/>

²⁴ See S. 4409 at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/4409> and <https://www.help.senate.gov/rep/newsroom/press/chairman-cassidy-colleagues-introduce-bills-to-support-apprenticeships-strengthen-american-workforce>.

²⁵ See examples of apprenticeship ratio policies that IEC and ABC believe unnecessarily constrain workforce development on pages 21-24 of comments on the Biden administration's apprenticeship rulemaking: https://www.abc.org/Portals/1/ABC_DOL_National%20Apprenticeship%20System%20Enhancements_3.18.2024.pdf#page=21.

for employers to invest in Registered Apprenticeship. Smart, flexible ratio policies can maintain high standards while allowing more workers to receive the structured training that strengthens both workforce quality and jobsite safety.

4. Increase awareness of apprenticeship opportunities.

Too many students, parents, and educators remain unaware of apprenticeship as a pathway to successful careers and a solution to the student debt burden facing young Americans and their families. Congress should support career exploration initiatives and funding that expose students to apprenticeship and skilled trades careers at an earlier age.

IEC members and chapters report that the K-12 education system has been incentivized to push matriculating students into college for the past few decades. Its failure to treat apprenticeship and skilled trades workforce development programs as equal pathways to career success as college enrollment is a key contributor to today's skilled labor shortage crisis.

However, educational institutions who partner with employers and industry and develop pipelines exposing students to the skilled trades are reversing this trend. America's youth and their families, faced with the rising cost of higher education and uncertainty about the future labor market, are turning to the trades.

IEC contractor outreach to middle school students at school career fairs, participation in trades and career signing day celebrations at high schools, investment in mobile skills demonstrations, and targeted outreach and recruitment via social media are producing positive results.

But much more can be done by government and industry to raise the profile and benefits of the skilled trades and apprenticeship.

5. Support implementation of expanded apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship eligibility for Workforce Pell.

Congress recently took an important step forward by making career and technical education, apprenticeship programs, and related materials eligible expenses for 529 college savings accounts. In addition, it expanded access to Pell Grants for high-quality, short-term workforce programs.²⁶

As articulated in IEC's comments on the Department of Education's proposed rule,²⁷ Workforce Pell has the potential to increase access to apprenticeship and workforce training opportunities, particularly for

²⁶ Workforce Pell was made possible via changes to Title IV of the Higher Education Act included in Pub. L. 119-21—commonly referred to as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (H.R. 1), and later the Working Families Tax Cut Act—passed by Congress via a simple majority budget reconciliation process that President Trump signed into law on July 4, 2025. Subtitle D, Section 83002 of the bill amends Section 401 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (U.S.C. 1070a) to include Workforce Pell Grants. Section 70414 of the OBBBA/WFTCA expanded 529 plans to cover career and technical education and apprenticeship programs and materials.

²⁷ See *IEC Submits Comments on Education Department's Workforce Pell Proposal*, April 13, 2026. <https://ieci.org/iec-submits-comments-on-education-departments-workforce-pell-proposal/> and <https://ieci.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Workforce-Pell-Docket-ID-ED-2026-OPE-0133-NPRM-Comments-from-Construction-Industry-Submitted-by-Ben-Brubeck-040826.pdf>.

students and workers who may not otherwise be able to afford the cost of related technical instruction provided by higher education institutions.

Although most IEC apprentices incur little or no out-of-pocket cost for their training, tuition and educational expenses may represent a barrier to entry for participants in apprenticeship and career and technical education programs.

Workforce Pell can help make skilled training affordable and encourage greater participation in Registered Apprenticeship programs offered by higher education institutions eligible for Title IV funding under the Pell system.

Of note, Workforce Pell may be better aligned to support pre-apprenticeship programs that fit neatly within Workforce Pell's statutory requirements of 150 to 599 clock hours and 8 to 15 weeks in duration.

As Workforce Pell is implemented following the May 19 publication of a Department of Education's final rule,²⁸ Congress, federal agencies, and state officials should provide clear guidance and streamlined processes that enable construction industry participants and providers to successfully utilize Workforce Pell in apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.

6. Reduce unnecessary administrative burdens on apprenticeship providers and learners.

IEC encourages Congress and the U.S. DOL to avoid implementing controversial provisions of the Biden administration's 2024 proposed rule overhauling the Registered Apprenticeship system that created administrative burdens on providers, learners, employers, and states.

Ultimately, after receiving substantial public comment and opposition from employers, industry organizations, and several states, the DOL withdrew the proposed rule without finalizing it.

If the national goal is to dramatically increase apprenticeship participation, policy should focus on reducing barriers rather than adding them. Every additional layer of bureaucracy consumes resources that employers could otherwise invest in recruiting apprentices, expanding classroom instruction, purchasing training equipment, hiring instructors, or serving additional employers.

Congress can strengthen Registered Apprenticeship by:

- Simplifying program approval and modification processes so employers can respond quickly to workforce demands.
- Reducing duplicative reporting requirements and unnecessary administrative burdens on sponsors.

²⁸ *Accountability in Higher Education and Access Through Demand-Driven Workforce Pell: Pell Grant Exclusion Relating to Other Grant Aid; and Workforce Pell Grants*, 5/19/26, 34 CFR Parts 600, 668, and 690, [Docket ID ED-2026-OPE-0133], RIN 1840-AD99, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/05/19/2026-10013/accountability-in-higher-education-and-access-through-demand-driven-workforce-pell-pell-grant>.

- Supporting employer-led and association-sponsored apprenticeship models, which allow small businesses to participate collectively without each maintaining a standalone administrative infrastructure.
- Ensuring that federal and state policies encourage the creation and expansion of apprenticeship programs rather than imposing unnecessary administrative hurdles that discourage employer participation.

From the perspective of IEC and our member companies, the greatest obstacle to expanding apprenticeship is not a lack of employer interest—it is unnecessary administrative friction and the disproportionate financial burden placed on employers. Every hour spent on additional paperwork, compliance reviews, or duplicative reporting is an hour not spent recruiting apprentices, training workers, or partnering with schools and workforce agencies.

Unlike many traditional education pathways, Registered Apprenticeship is already heavily subsidized by industry itself. Employers pay apprentices a competitive wage from day one while also investing in supervision, on-the-job training, related technical instruction, equipment, curriculum, instructors, and the administrative costs required to maintain a high-quality registered program. The private sector is already carrying much of the cost of developing America's skilled workforce.

If the federal government can invest billions of dollars each year supporting traditional postsecondary education, it should also invest more directly in the workforce programs that are building the electricians and skilled professionals our economy urgently needs. Strategic investments that offset related technical instruction, support employer-sponsored training, and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens would enable apprenticeship sponsors to serve more employers and train more apprentices without lowering standards.

Congress and the U.S. DOL should continue to support the integrity of the Registered Apprenticeship system while ensuring that future reforms make it easier—not harder—for employers to participate. By reducing red tape and making targeted investments in employer-led training, policymakers can help scale apprenticeship to meet the nation's workforce needs while recognizing it as an equally valuable pathway to economic opportunity as traditional postsecondary education.

IEC encourages Congress and the U.S. DOL to keep this perspective in mind as they contemplate oversight and additional subregulatory guidance for the Registered Apprenticeship system to meet the evolving needs of America's modern economy.

VI. Apprenticeships Change Lives

Statistics tell an important story, but the true value of apprenticeship for the modern economy is best understood through the lives it changes.

Jayden came to IEC through our pre-apprentice program in the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.²⁹ His workforce development program combined online learning, virtual instruction, and hands-on training all inside a juvenile justice facility.

When I learned Jayden was preparing to reenter the workforce after completing the program, I made one phone call to an IEC contractor. I explained that although he had a record, he had completed our pre-apprenticeship program. They hired him immediately.

Then came the texts I will never forget.

First came pictures of his new work boots. Then his first car. Then his first apartment. And just last month, he completed his first year of apprenticeship with a 91% average.

Today, Jayden is on his way to becoming a skilled electrician contributing to critical infrastructure projects in his community and helping meet America's growing workforce needs.

He is succeeding because IEC innovated at every step of the apprenticeship journey, from creating new on-ramps into apprenticeship, to modernizing how it's delivered, to removing barriers that keep people from completing, to connecting employers with talented people ready to work.

Jayden's story is not unique. Thousands of apprentices enter IEC programs each year seeking opportunity, and thousands graduate with the skills needed to build rewarding careers while strengthening America's economy.

Jayden proudly sent us a picture wearing his new steel-toed boots and holding a sign that said "First Day at Work," with the same excitement many parents feel when taking a picture on their child's first day of kindergarten.

Technology didn't change his life. People did. But technology helped us reach him, prepare him, support him, and scale that opportunity to thousands of others.

AI won't install conduit. AI won't pull wire. AI won't energize a hospital. AI won't restore power after a hurricane. People will. Skilled men and women will.

If America wants to lead the world in innovation, America must invest just as boldly in the people who make that innovation possible.

When education meets opportunity, lives change.

When government, education, and industry work together, those opportunities multiply.

IEC stands ready to help America build not only the workforce of today, but the workforce our AI-enabled future demands.

²⁹ *IEC Empowers Opportunities by Driving Florida Department of Juvenile Justice Program*, March 10, 2025, <https://ieci.org/iec-empowers-opportunities-by-driving-florida-department-of-juvenile-justice-program/>

VII. Conclusion

America's economic future depends on its ability to develop a highly skilled workforce.

The electricians trained through Registered Apprenticeship programs will build the data centers powering artificial intelligence, modernize the electric grid, construct advanced manufacturing facilities, deploy broadband infrastructure, and support the communities where Americans live and work.

The workforce challenges facing America are significant, but so is the opportunity.

Registered Apprenticeship offers a proven, scalable, and effective solution. It connects workers to opportunity, employers to talent, and communities to economic growth.

IEC stands ready to collaborate with Congress, the Trump administration, state and local governments, educational institutions, employers, and workforce partners to expand apprenticeship opportunities and strengthen America's workforce pipeline.

On behalf of IEC and the merit shop electrical contracting community, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.