



Wireless
Infrastructure
Association

Testimony of
Tim House
Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer
Wireless Infrastructure Association

Before the
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
Committee on Education and Workforce
United States House of Representatives

March 4, 2026

Chairman Owens, Ranking Member Adams, Chairman Walberg, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this important hearing on Building an AI-Ready America: Strengthening Employer-Led Training. I am Tim House, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at the Wireless Infrastructure Association (“WIA”), the principal association representing the companies that design, build, own, and operate the infrastructure that powers America’s mobile and fixed wireless networks. In addition to advocating for the wireless infrastructure industry at the state and federal levels, WIA serves as National Sponsor of the Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program, or TIRAP, which is also the only organization recognized by the Department of Labor as an Industry Intermediary for the telecommunications sector. Both as the National Sponsor of TIRAP and on behalf of its members, WIA is heavily engaged in ensuring an adequate and highly skilled workforce for the telecommunications industry. We welcome the opportunity to share our perspective.

I thank the Subcommittee for this timely hearing. The communications industry, similar to many others across the country, currently faces a shortage of trained and highly skilled workers.

However, the demand for this talent pool is particularly acute due to historic demand for deploying connectivity in unconnected communities, expected maintenance and enhancements of existing networks, and, indeed, supporting the current evolution of AI technology. In the coming five years, we will continue to see the AI boom require increased infrastructure at the same time NTIA's \$42 billion BEAD program funding goes out to 56 states and territories, creating unprecedented demand while also creating thousands of jobs in the process; but only if we prepare correctly. WIA and the wireless industry have worked diligently to address this shortfall for several years and have seen one model set itself apart as having the flexibility and responsiveness to employer needs that is required to create this talent pipeline—competency-based, employer-led, Registered Apprenticeships. This is why WIA was proud to support the President's Executive Order on preparing Americans for high-paying skilled trade jobs and the Administration's stated goal of enrolling at least one million new registered apprentices.¹

Congress, and this Subcommittee in particular, has an important role in supporting this laudable, but lofty, goal. Recognizing the efficacy of Registered Apprenticeships is a helpful first step, but to truly deliver the workforce needed to maintain America's leadership in technology and innovation we must also expand the opportunities for these programs. Recent legislation, including the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act ("IIJA")² and the Working Family Tax Cuts Act³ provided needed funding to create and maintain these programs. However, the marquee

¹ Exec. Order 14278, *Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future*, 90 Fed. Reg. 17525 (Apr. 23, 2025). See also *Preparing the Wireless and Broadband Workforce for the AI Future*, <https://wia.org/preparing-the-wireless-and-broadband-workforce-for-the-ai-future/>

² Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Pub. L. No. 117-58, 35 Stat. 429, 1246-50, Tit. VI- Telecommunications Industry Workforce (2021) (codified at 47 U.S.C. § 1754).

³ Pub. L. No. 119-21, 139 Stat. 350, Sec. 83002 (amending the Federal Pell Grant program to allow students enrolled in eligible workforce programs to receive this support).

legislation supporting workforce development programs, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (“WIOA”) has not been formally reauthorized since its expiration in 2020. We believe the time is ripe to reauthorize and modernize this legislation to give all stakeholders the certainty they need to continue utilizing these programs. Proposals like those in Rep. Foxx’s “A Stronger Workforce For America Act” (“ASWA”)⁴ that would facilitate skills-based hiring by recognizing the knowledge and competencies obtained through on-the-job training and expanding the criteria for accepted credentials, are crucial to making these opportunities available to interested participants and should be included in any efforts to modernize WIOA during this Congress.

As part of this reauthorization and modernization, addressing the fragmented and often ad hoc nature of WIOA is essential. Governors need to be empowered to direct WIOA funding in a more strategic and streamlined manner to address urgent workforce development needs across critical sectors such as telecommunications, AI, and energy. Employers often have to navigate multiple local areas with different rules, policies, and contractual requirements to apply for and receive WIOA funding for upskilling and reskilling employees, which inhibits utilization. Allowing governors greater flexibility and discretion to direct WIOA funding through statewide strategies and programs would go a long way toward addressing this critical issue and increase the speed at which the public workforce system can pivot to support rapidly changing workforce needs due to technologies such as AI.

⁴ A Stronger Workforce for America Act, H.R. 6655, 118th Cong. (2024).

I. Registered Apprenticeships are a Tried and Trusted Model that Congress Should Continue to Support.

If I can impart one message today, it is the importance of apprenticeships. Registered Apprenticeships, particularly with those that are coordinated with employers to emphasize the specific skills they look for in potential hires, and are supported through practical, on-the-job training, are well-suited for “high-demand occupations” like telecommunications deployment.⁵ These programs address the need to rapidly expand the available talent pool while providing the participants with practical skills that will be useful throughout their careers and facilitate the ultimate goal of gainful, long-term employment. Registered Apprenticeships, like TIRAP, combine classroom and on-the-job training with competency-based evaluation; this enables participants to progress through the program by demonstrating they have obtained the requisite skills, not just that they participated in a classroom lecture for a predefined number of hours.

Employer-informed programs also ensure that once apprentices complete the program, they are equipped with the necessary skills and tools to progress in their preferred industry. In addition to providing a strong foundation for participants, certifications from trusted, competency-based programs mean employers can trust that their new employees have the appropriate knowledge and will not need extensive additional training.

The success of apprenticeship programs is well documented: the Department of Labor calls Registered Apprenticeships “a proven solution for quickly and efficiently recruiting, training, and retaining world-class telecommunications talent in good quality jobs.” In 2024 alone, there were 8,600 registered apprentices in the telecommunications industry, an 116% increase over the last

⁵ See ApprenticeshipUSA, *Telecommunications*, <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/apprenticeship-industries/telecommunications> (listing high-demand apprenticeship occupations including telecommunications tower technician, wireless technician, and fiber optic technician).

five years.⁶ The interest in these opportunities has only continued to grow since then, driven by hardworking students looking for good jobs without a four-year degree.

WIA has been recognized as a National Sponsor of Registered Apprenticeships by the Department of Labor since 2017. The Program now encompasses 113 participating employers across sixteen DOL-approved occupations and has helped over 7,200 apprentices find meaningful work that will also provide them with skills for a future career. This success has been a direct result of the Industry Intermediary model, which encourages partnerships between prospective employers and organizations providing training and education to ensure courses and skills are closely tailored to actual demand.

This program has also sought to bring opportunities to various communities that have traditionally been overlooked. We are proud to support our veteran community by providing former military professionals with a structured pathway to earn income while learning the skills to pursue a meaningful career in a fast-growing industry. Further, service members are able to utilize their GI Bill benefit to receive a tax-free monthly stipend while participating in a Registered Apprenticeship Program.⁷ WIA has also collaborated with career and technical educational (“CTE”) institutions and higher-ed programs, including within Historically Black and Tribal Colleges and Universities, to ensure these opportunities are available in every community in America and for those seeking two- and four-year programs.

These efforts have been a direct result of the industry intermediary model—where third parties convene all relevant stakeholders to ensure that training aligns with employer’s real-world

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ See Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program, *Apprenticeships for U.S. Veterans & Military Spouses*, <https://www.tirap.org/veterans/>.

expectations. Industry Intermediaries further reduce complexity for employers by handling the complex, and often bureaucratic, process of navigating registration, compliance, and coordination with training partners. Industry Intermediaries also provide technical assistance to help employers develop high-quality standards and support recruitment strategies. This means employers can focus on delivering the actual training needed and have access to a ready pipeline of interested participants.

As this Committee considers how to support an AI-ready workforce—including by reauthorizing WIOA and improving its provisions for the modern demands on our workforce—I implore you to keep in mind the proven success of registered apprenticeship programs and limit harmful overregulation that could impact the future of apprenticeships. Each industry’s needs are different, and overly prescriptive, one-size-fits-all rules and regulations would risk these programs’ ability to adapt to market changes.

II. States Play a Vital Role in Supporting and Facilitating Apprenticeship Programs.

While support from the federal government is essential to these programs’ long-term success, it is also important that states are included in the development and implementation of a variety of workforce programs, including apprenticeship. Each state has critical insights into where additional workers are needed in its jurisdiction. Additionally, the ability to convene employers to determine where this need exists and what specific skills they look for in employees can ensure that participants receive instruction and training in the areas that will best equip them for gainful employment. WIA has seen this vital role firsthand through its successful partnerships in Ohio and Texas.

WIA has served as the Industry Intermediary for Ohio’s Broadband and 5G Sector Partnership (“Sector Partnership”) since 2022. In 2021, Ohio identified a broadband workforce

shortage⁸ and sought to address it head-on via the Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation, led by then-Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted. Ohio’s Sector Partnership is convened and overseen by the Governor’s Office but is industry-led by WIA, housed at The Ohio State University, and operationalized through regional hubs across Ohio’s seven economic development regions that consist of colleges and universities, community colleges, career technical centers, and OhioMeansJobs Centers (American Job Centers). One of the programs launched through the Sector Partnership was the 5G Readiness Program, a 12-week program made up of four credentials in various parts of the wireless ecosystem, with those who complete all four receiving the “5G Readiness Credential.”

This program has been a remarkable success, with 1,093 participants receiving 5G certifications since its inception. Since the launch of the Sector Partnership, Ohio has announced fifteen new broadband and 5G workforce programs across the state. These programs are located across the education and training continuum, including nonprofits, vocational and technical schools, community colleges, and four-year universities, through regional hubs and will prepare participants for a variety of jobs in the telecommunications industry. The Sector Partnership continues to lead the development and distribution of additional education and training programs across the state. These sorts of programs, where states identify a unique problem they are facing and work with the industry and educational institutions to find solutions, should be widely encouraged.

In addition to its partnership with The Ohio State University, we have seen success in bringing these programs to the often overlooked; such as a partnership with Ashland University to

⁸ See *Strengthening Ohio’s Broadband & 5G Workforce*, BROADBANDOHIO, <https://broadband.ohio.gov/explore-broadband/strengthening-ohios-broadband-5g-workforce> (last visited Feb. 28, 2026).

help approximately 140 incarcerated Ohioans obtain the skills necessary to pursue working in the broadband economy after re-entry.⁹ This effort, funded in part through the Ohio Department of Development’s Individual Microcredential Assistance Program has opened new opportunities for previously incarcerated individuals, supporting them on long-term career paths and helping to reduce recidivism.

Ohio is not the only state WIA is assisting in addressing workforce needs. Just this past fall, we were awarded a grant from the Texas Broadband Development Office to build a comprehensive program to educate and train Texans for in-demand broadband careers in partnership with the University of Houston System.¹⁰ This program, funded by the state Broadband Infrastructure Fund, will be tuition-free and offered statewide. The project will establish certification programs to provide hands-on training to future fiber optic technicians, with post-certification job placement support from Texas employers in the digital infrastructure sector. WIA is excited to begin this work and prepare the next generation of Texans for high-demand broadband jobs. Given WIA’s experience in establishing, scaling, and successfully operating these workforce programs, the hub and spoke model in partnership with large university systems is proven and transferable, and we are in conversations with other states about similar programs.

Importantly, states have already taken the lead on this by initiating these programs under a variety of state and federal funding mechanisms. For example, Ohio established its Broadband and 5G Sector Partnership by utilizing \$3 million in funding from the 2020 Coronavirus Aid,

⁹ *WIA Partners with Ashland University to Offer Broadband and 5G Training to Incarcerated Individuals*, WIA (Mar. 22, 2023), <https://wia.org/wia-partners-with-ashland-university-to-offer-broadband-and-5g-training-to-incarcerated-individuals/>.

¹⁰ *Wireless Infrastructure Association Awarded \$5M Grant to Lead Texas Broadband Workforce Program*, WIA (Oct. 2, 2025), <https://wia.org/wireless-infrastructure-association-awarded-5m-grant-to-lead-texas-broadband-workforce-program/>.

Relief, and Economic Security (“CARES”) Act. Ohio then further braided federal funds to continue support for the Sector Partnership by leveraging \$3 million in funding from the Good Jobs Challenge (EDA/Commerce) and \$9 million in funding from Quality Jobs, Equity, Strategy and Training (“QUEST”) Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker Grants (DOL).

There are also other existing federal funding mechanisms that can support broadband workforce development which should be utilized to support this important goal, such as the Department of Commerce’s Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (“BEAD”) Program. This \$42 billion fund, created through the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, in addition to supporting investments in fixed broadband, allows states to use funds for a variety of connectivity goals including workforce development.¹¹ Notably, after Secretary Lutnick and the Trump Administration released the BEAD Policy Restructuring Notice to expand eligible participation and enhance competition, this program has approximately \$21 billion in available funding for remaining connectivity needs.¹² Directing Commerce and its subagency, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (“NTIA”), to encourage states to use their remaining funding, also called “non-deployment funds,” on workforce development programs would go a long way in addressing critical workforce gaps while allowing states to maintain control of the programs and how they are administered. NTIA has highlighted workforce as an

¹¹ See Pub. L. No. 117-58, 135 Stat. 429, 1182-1208 (establishing the BEAD program).

¹² See generally *Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program: BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice*, NTIA (June 6, 2025), <https://www.ntia.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/bead-restructuring-policy-notice.pdf>. See also *“Benefit of the Bargain” Reforms Turbocharge Speed and Savings*, NTIA (Sept. 5, 2025), <https://www.ntia.gov/press-release/2025/benefit-bargain-reforms-turbocharge-speed-and-savings>; *Assistant Secretary Arielle Roth Announces 50 BEAD Final Proposals Approved*, NTIA (Feb. 9, 2026) (noting an estimated \$21 billion in savings from reforms to the BEAD program).

area where states should invest,¹³ but not since the May 2025 rule change. Congressional guidance, such as that proposed in the SPEED For BEAD Act and the SUCCESS For BEAD Act,¹⁴ could ensure that these funds are effectively used to bolster the broadband workforce.

Congress has a strong part to play in ensuring the workforce is ready to build AI infrastructure and bring the AI future to fruition, but it is important to ensure states are active stakeholders as well. With a complex workforce need and swiftly evolving technology, strengthening workforce development requires a whole-of-government approach with insightful, flexible state programs and conscientious use of existing federal programs leading the way.

III. The AI Revolution Requires a Strong Communications Workforce.

While the long-term impacts of the AI revolution are still yet to be seen, the important role of the communications workforce in enabling these advancements cannot be understated. The men and women working today in occupations across the broadband ecosystem, from fiber optic technicians to RF engineers, are deploying the foundational infrastructure that underpins this technology. In addition to the work that will continue unabated to deploy and improve fixed and mobile broadband services, the increasing demand for other types of AI infrastructure will require a significant pipeline of new workers in occupations across the communications industry.¹⁵

¹³ See, e.g., *Workforce Planning Guide, Guidance for BEAD Program Eligible Entities*, NTIA (Oct. 7, 2022), https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/DOC_NTIA_Workforce%20Planning%20Guide_FINAL_100722.pdf.

¹⁴ S. 3565, Supporting U.S. Critical Connectivity and Economic Strategy and Security for BEAD Act [“SUCCESS For BEAD Act “], 119th Cong. (Dec. 18, 2025); H.R. 1870, Streamlining Program Efficiency and Expanding Deployment for BEAD Act [“SPEED For BEAD Act”], 119th Cong. (Mar. 3, 2025) (both providing that NTIA should allow Eligible Entities to utilize remaining BEAD funds for telecommunications workforce development programs).

¹⁵ See, e.g., *American Tower Corporation Reports Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2025 Financial Results* (Feb. 24, 2026) (“Leasing demand across our global tower portfolio and data center business remains robust, underpinned by sustained growth in mobile data consumption, continued 5G deployment, and increasing hybrid-cloud and AI-related workloads.”).

Further, recognizing that the widespread use of these tools may shift labor demand in certain sectors, WIA believes Registered Apprenticeships will play a pivotal role in training and reskilling any displaced workers. Previous technological revolutions, from the advent of the printing press to the modern internet, have shifted how and where people work. However, we have seen time and again that these workers are not unilaterally left behind but were able to find new opportunities—often in roles that provide higher wages and quality of life. We believe the AI revolution will be no different. By putting in place programs today to provide this training and upskilling, Congress can ensure there is minimal disruption to American workers while bringing the benefits of this technology to all communities.

In fact, while there will be shifts in labor demand, recent economic analysis presented at the World Economic Forum (“WEF”) indicates that the AI revolution will be a net job-creator.¹⁶ This will not happen, however, without resources and opportunities to re-train and re-skill displaced workers. The *Future of Jobs Report* further highlights this need, highlighting “key priorities” including bridging skills gaps, investing in re- and up-skilling, and creating pathways into fast-growing jobs and skills that are in high demand.¹⁷

Even before the rise of ubiquitous integration of AI applications in everyday life, data demands on wireless networks have been constantly increasing. A report from WIA member Ericsson showed that global mobile data usage, including mobile services and Fixed Wireless Access (“FWA”), has more than doubled since 2021; rising from 84.3 exabytes per month in 2021

¹⁶ See generally *Future of Jobs Report 2025*, WORLD ECON. FORUM (Jan. 2025), https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_Report_2025.pdf (extrapolating current data trends over the next five years demonstrates that, globally, while new technology—including automation—will displace about 8% of current occupations, it is also expected to create new jobs equivalent to approximately 14% of current total employment; a net job creation of 78 million jobs).

¹⁷ See *id.* at 6 (“Given these evolving skill demands, the scale of workforce upskilling and reskilling expected to be needed remains significant: if the world’s workforce was made up of 100 people, 59 would need training by 2030.”).

to 196 exabytes per month in 2025.¹⁸ Ericsson projects by 2031 global mobile data usage will increase to over 481 exabytes per month. Increasing wireless coverage and capacity are essential to meeting these demands, and wireless AI infrastructure will need to continue to deploy for years to come.

These deployments will require a ready, skilled, and efficient workforce. AI infrastructure, including traditional wireless infrastructure like cell towers, is complex to deploy and maintain, requiring a multi-skilled workforce. TIRAP currently offers sixteen occupations covering these different and ever-evolving needs, including wireless technician, fiber optic technician, underground and overhead utility installer, and tower technician. Programs like TIRAP, as well as those funded under WIOA, will need to continue to grow our base of apprentices and remain aligned with industry's needs as it shifts during this period of rapid growth.

Training new employees is not the end of the workforce development process. In addition to TIRAP's programs, WIA's Telecommunications Education Center ("TEC") offers multiple training options for those new to or familiar with the telecommunications industry to develop skills. TEC offers in-person training, instructor-led webinars, and self-paced eLearning courses that are used to skill and upskill workers. With a rapidly evolving industry, education must evolve with it. WIA's TEC works with academic experts and employers alike to develop these materials, ensuring these courses offer essential theory while developing the skills needed for hands-on work. The information is standardized, so employers of TEC program graduates know their new employees have the knowledge to do the job.

¹⁸ *Ericsson Mobility Report- Mobile Data Traffic Outlook*, ERICSSON (Nov. 2025), <https://www.ericsson.com/en/reports-and-papers/mobility-report/dataforecasts/mobile-traffic-forecast>.

IV. Conclusion.

A dearth of adequate telecommunications workforce available to support current and future deployments will have impacts throughout the economy. Every sector now depends on reliable broadband—whether through fixed connections in homes and offices, or mobile services used on the road and everywhere in between. Without sufficient network capacity and the skilled workforce required to maintain it, the simplest business operations we all rely on—from emails to virtual meetings, even livestreamed events like this hearing—could be disrupted. Ensuring the workforce is available and fully prepared for the scale of expansion ahead is essential to protecting economic stability, supporting innovation, advancing national security objectives, and meeting the nation’s growing digital demands.