

Testimony of Dr. Sharon Johnson
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On-the-Job: Rebuilding the Workforce through Apprenticeships

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It is an honor to be with you today. Thank you Chairman Guthrie for the invitation and for the work of your subcommittee to address the ever-evolving workforce challenges, to learn from both workforce initiative successes and failures, and for your work to prepare a talent pipeline to advance America. Thanks to your oversight and support, I have several work-based-learning successes to share with you as you consider rebuilding the workforce through apprenticeships.

The workforce development system, especially the Workforce Development Boards, play a significant role in convening partners to identify, coordinate, direct, and support regional work-based-learning models. Through WIOA, there are numerous examples of work-based-learning models that eligible job seekers and youth may consider as part of their development plan; examples include paid work experiences, internships, and on-the-job training. Likewise, companies benefit from a more work-ready talent pipeline through work-based-learning models of incumbent worker training, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships. In our region, work-based-learning models that are developed and customized to meet business needs and business learning preferences are the most requested methods for training and upskilling workers.

Two work-based-learning models have been especially successful in the Shenandoah Valley, on-the-job training and apprenticeships. Last year the SVWDB completed the Valley Workforce On-the-Job Training initiative focused on healthcare and advanced manufacturing. The targeted population was long-term unemployed, underemployed, and dislocated workers and the initiative provided OJT training for occupations along career pathways requiring higher skill levels. The SVWDB convened economic development, businesses, community colleges, technical centers, adjacent workforce boards, service providers, and community organizations to design and implement the initiative. Five hundred seventy-seven (577) participants were

served through on-the-job training contracts with businesses, 471 completed training and entered employment, and 143 earned industry credentials.

The second work-based-learning model is registered apprenticeship and is based on the need for companies to build their own skilled workforce in high demand occupations. On-the-job mentoring provided by company experts and theoretical training are required elements of apprenticeship programs. By convening and working with regional partners, the SVWDB acts as an intermediary to provide technical support and flexible designs to meet company needs. We are fortunate to have a cooperative state apprenticeship agency that we work with to register apprentices. Apprentices receive theoretical training provided by an array of resources and selected by the company. Community college and technical school classroom training, on-line training, vendor training, and in-house subject matter expert training are all supported methods of delivery for the theoretical training. Participant advancement through apprenticeship programs may be accelerated based on credit for prior work experience or training, and based on competencies achieved.

We are working with 75 companies, of these 19 are new apprenticeship sponsors and 39 companies have added a new occupation to their current apprenticeship program. Five hundred fifty-two (552) new apprentices have been enrolled. Many are working toward industry certifications in occupations for manufacturing technician, electrician, machine operator, maintenance mechanic, and millwright.

In addition to the traditional company sponsored apprenticeship model, the SVWDB is supporting several pre-apprenticeship models. One model is an inclusive apprenticeship for individuals with disabilities who seek careers in advanced manufacturing. This model begins with assessments and is supported with remedial and supportive services such as training and work accommodations, and work uniforms and tools. There are established selection criteria and an extensive screening process. This is an excellent opportunity for interagency partnering and the establishment of cross program braided funding. The first graduate of the pre-apprenticeship program was hired by The Hershey Company as their first Industrial Manufacturing Technician production apprentice. Once convinced of the apprenticeship model for production operators, The Hershey Company has now placed 53 apprentices into the new Industrial Manufacturing Technician occupation.

Another pre-apprenticeship model that we are piloting is a Manufacturing Production Boot Camp; a two-week intensive, customized training for potential hires designed to increase the pipeline of production operators and improve retention of new hires in the occupation. The

boot camp is focused on recent high school graduates. The first week of the customized program includes company and manufacturing theoretical training and the second week involves on-site plant hands-on training. From the pre-apprenticeship boot camp pilot, eight boot camp participants have been hired and registered in the Industrial Manufacturing Technician apprenticeship program.

These are examples of work-based-learning models with an emphasis on registered apprenticeships. Please remember there is no perfect training and upskilling model to meet the needs of every company, for every occupation, for every training need. Therefore, the SVWDB and our regional Integrated Business Services Teams are always looking for new work-based-learning models to meet the talent pipeline needs of businesses. We are anxious to learn more about the new Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Program (IRAP) and how we can implement the new model in the Shenandoah Valley. The SVWDB and our regional Integrated Business Services Teams are always looking for additional tools and resources to serve our businesses.

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Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board, Inc.

Building partnerships to create workforce opportunities that cultivate business, grow jobs, develop people, and build community.