

Testimony Submitted to the
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment
Hearing on Innovations in Expanding Registered Apprenticeship Programs

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Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada, AFL-CIO**

Thank you, Chairwoman Davis, Ranking Member Smucker, and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to provide this testimony. My name is James Pavesic. I completed my pipefitting apprenticeship in Chicago in 1983 and worked 26 years in the field as a journeyman pipefitter. In addition, with the support of my union and without stepping away from my job as pipefitter, I was able to earn my Associate's and Bachelor's degrees. I am now the Director of Education and Training for the United Association of Union Plumbers and Pipefitters of the United States and Canada ("UA"). On behalf of the more than 350,000 members of the UA, I want to thank the Committee for giving me the opportunity to speak to you about what I believe are the keys to a successful apprenticeship program that has been in operation for decades and has stood the test of time. There are currently over 45,000 apprentices participating in registered apprenticeship programs supported by the United Association and our International Training Fund. These programs provide training covering the full range of crafts that make up the UA, including HVAC technicians, plumbers, pipefitters, welders and sprinkler fitters.

A. Partnership

A successful apprenticeship program is built on a partnership between organized labor, signatory employers, government and in the past few years accrediting agencies, such as the Council on Occupational Education ("COE"). Through collectively bargained contributions to joint trust funds, the UA and its signatory employers are able to invest over 200 million private, non-taxpayer dollars each year in apprenticeship and journeymen training.¹ This investment is

¹ This includes expenditures made by the UA's International Training Fund as well as those made by the hundreds of Local UA Training Programs throughout the United States, all of which are funded entirely with non-taxpayer dollars.

made because apprenticeship is the lifeblood of our industry and high quality training is what sets a UA craft person apart from others in the plumbing and pipefitting industry.

The importance of the investments that the UA and other building trades unions make in construction industry apprenticeships cannot be overstated. The construction industry nationwide is facing increasing skill shortages due to retirements of baby boomers, shifting demographics, and other factors. It is no secret to anyone who has studied the U.S. construction industry that apprenticeship and other training programs sponsored by the UA and our sister building trades unions provide the lion's share of the training for the industry as a whole.² We understand that the ability of the United States to build projects safely and to the high-quality standards Americans deserve and expect very much depends on the ability of the UA and other building trades unions to recruit, train and deploy the next generation of skilled craftsmen and women. We take that responsibility seriously and work hard every single day to meet it.

Subject matter experts are also essential partners in a successful apprenticeship program. The UA meets this need not only by securing top-flight instructors, but also by working with the International Joint Pipe Trades Committee, Inc., a non-profit corporation, to obtain high-quality and up-to-date training books and manuals from technical authors and publishing companies which reflect the latest changes in technology. In addition, through our WebBooks program, all apprentices have the ability to access their entire "book bag" on their laptop, iPad, personal phone or other device.

² See, e.g., Allison L. Huang, Robert E. Chapman, and David T. Butry, *Metrics and Tools for Measuring Construction Productivity: Technical and Empirical Considerations*, U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Office of Applied Economics, September 2009, p. 23, ("Typically, training programs are funded by both owners and contractors through union and collective bargaining agreements. While open shop training programs exist, they tend to be rare.")

UA apprenticeship programs have always been part of the registered apprenticeship system and we believe very strongly in it. UA apprenticeship programs also benefit from participation in the accreditation process conducted by the COE. Starting at the International level down to Local UA programs, the COE has reviewed and accredited UA apprenticeship programs who have chosen to go through its multi-step certification process. During the process every aspect of the program of education offered by the apprenticeship program is reviewed. By completing the process and obtaining accreditation, our programs are able to provide instruction for which participants receive college credit.

B. Recruitment

UA apprenticeship programs are committed to offering the benefits of apprenticeship to all qualified applicants, including those from traditionally under represented populations such as people of color and women. Representatives of UA apprenticeship programs regularly attend local, regional and national job fairs and other meetings and conventions where potentially interested and qualified applicants can be found. In addition, the UA has created different videos that are designed for guidance counselors, parents and high school students that explain the benefits of a UA apprenticeship program as one of many high-quality postsecondary options. Moreover, representatives of UA apprenticeship programs receive training on best practices for expanding the reach of their recruitment efforts.³

The UA has also led the way in working with the United States Military to train and place veterans into our apprenticeship programs through our award winning Veterans in Piping

³ Local UA apprenticeship programs will regularly advertise and provide notice to community outreach programs when applications for entry into the apprenticeship program will be available and otherwise comply with the United States Department of Labor's Regulations on Equal Employment Opportunity in Apprenticeship.

Program (“VIP”). Under the program, the UA offers transitioning service men and women from all branches of the military the opportunity to participate in an intensive eighteen week program on base, where they receive cutting-edge training in one of the crafts that make up the plumbing and pipefitting industry. This training is paid out of jointly-sponsored trust funds of the UA and our signatory employers and comes at zero cost to the government, the military or the student. Upon successful completion, graduates are placed in a UA Local apprenticeship program, given advanced credit toward the completion of their apprenticeship program, and guaranteed a job. This program currently operates on seven different military installations and since its inception has provided apprenticeship opportunities to 1,969 military veterans.⁴

It is important to bear in mind that recruitment is only as good as the program that is offered and UA apprenticeships provide the opportunity for apprentices to earn while they learn. Apprentices are paid an increasing scale of wages and also receive health care coverage and become participants in retirement plans. For example, pipefitter apprentices in my home Local Union, Local 597 of Chicago, currently receive, on average, a wage of \$32.79 per hour, along with high-quality health coverage, contributions to a 401(k) and other benefits. Apprentices who complete the program today will earn an hourly journeyman wage of \$48.50 and begin receiving contributions to a Defined Benefit Pension Plan, on top of their 401(k). Family-supporting wages and benefits of this kind are not limited to Chicago. A great many UA journeymen throughout the United States earn well over six figures per year in wages, along with similar benefits.

⁴ The UA efforts at helping veterans does not end with the VIP program. UA apprenticeship programs offer direct entry to veterans who have received any related training while serving our country.

In addition to receiving on the job instruction, apprentices attend classes at one of the hundreds of state-of-the-art local UA training schools across the country. Completion of the five year apprenticeship program leads to journeyman status and the opportunity to continue to work in an ever growing industry with lifetime skills that are in high demand. Also, participants in UA apprenticeship programs incur little or no cost for their education and come out of the apprenticeship program debt free.⁵ They are also eligible to earn—again, at no cost to them—up to 45 college credits toward the receipt of an Associate’s Degree.

C. Innovation

Industries change and a successful apprenticeship program must change with them, from the content of the curriculum to the manner in which material is presented. UA apprenticeships partner with industry suppliers and manufacturers to design and implement training programs that are on the cutting edge of new technologies. Recognizing that today’s student grew up in a digital world, the UA has become a leader in the use of virtual reality training aids, online resource libraries for both students and instructors, as well as the creation of apps that assist in learning and on the job. The UA is also working on a new apprenticeship program that will concentrate on training participants in high demand skills such as Computer Aided Design (CAD) and Building Information Modeling (BIM).

D. Dedication

No apprenticeship program can be successful without a cohort of trained and dedicated instructors who are willing and eager to share their skills and knowledge with those entering the

⁵ According to the United States Department of Education the average debt per college student is \$33,310.00 spread out over 42.9 million students. U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Federal Student Loan Portfolio (2018), <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/data-center/student/portfolio>.

industry. UA Local apprenticeship programs employ thousands of such individuals who every year have the opportunity to attend a week long seminar in Ann Arbor, Michigan where they are taught not only the latest technologies from industry leading experts, but also how to teach adult learners and use technology in their classes.

E. Excellence

The purpose of any apprenticeship program is to produce a qualified journey person, which includes not only the mastering of certain skill sets and the attainment of advanced knowledge of a craft, but also an understanding that what you do impacts the lives of countless numbers of Americans. To achieve this, all involved in the program—the classroom instructors, those on the job who share their knowledge and experience, the employer and, of course, the apprentice—must be dedicated to achieving and maintaining a standard of excellence.

Let me close by encouraging the members of this Committee to be mindful of the fact that anyone can call something an “apprenticeship program.” As I hope I have been able to convey, it takes a great deal more to actually build and maintain a successful one. A successful apprenticeship program should not be a for profit enterprise where students are asked to pay “tuition” or veterans are required to use their GI benefits, nor should it be simply an opportunity for employers to obtain workers who receive lower wages in exchange for the illusion of training and future job opportunities. In the UA’s view, the best way for the government to make life-changing apprenticeship opportunities available to Americans is to support the programs that invest the time and resources—and commit to the high standards—necessary to produce those opportunities. In addition, because smaller, less-established programs fail at a far greater rate than larger programs, the government should increase its regulatory focus on those programs.

The U.S. Congress can also support high-caliber registered apprenticeship programs in our industry by ensuring that the contractors which participate in such programs and use registered apprentices on jobs are credited for those investments in the federal procurement process. This could be done, for example, by adopting legislation to require contractors that bid on federal construction projects to participate in registered apprenticeship programs and use a certain number of registered apprentices on the project. Such requirements could take the form of a pre-qualification requirement for contractors, or be included in the contractor responsibility evaluation that is conducted under federal procurement laws. Taking these kinds of steps would not only promote the expansion of registered apprenticeship opportunities, but also help to address the increasing skill shortages facing our industry, thereby ensuring that the United States has the skilled workforce necessary to build safe and high-quality projects in the future.

I would like to invite each and every member of this Committee to see what a successful apprenticeship program looks like by visiting one of our training centers. It would be our privilege to have you.

At the UA, we and our partners understand that apprenticeship is the lifeblood of the industry, and as evidenced by our decades of success and the hundreds of millions of non-taxpayer dollars that are invested each year in UA-supported training, we take pride in our programs and strive every day to meet or exceed a standard for excellence.

Thank you again for this opportunity.