

June 4, 2019

Written Testimony of Joshua Broder, Chief Executive Officer, Tilson Technology Management to U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Small Business, Subcommittee on Innovation and Workforce Development: *Mind the Skills Gap: Apprenticeships and Training Programs*

Chairman Crow and Ranking Member Balderson, my name is Josh Broder and I am the CEO of Tilson Technology Management, a high-growth telecommunications and information infrastructure development company. Founded in 1996 and headquartered in Portland, Maine, Tilson has experienced extraordinary growth since 2012 and shows no signs of slowing. For over 18 months, we have been hiring an average of 35 new team members a month across our 23 offices nationwide. With more than 550 employees spread across 40 states, our largest office locations are found in:

(163) Portland, Maine **(60) Salt Lake City, Utah** **(45) Clay and Newark, New York**
(25) Denver and Parker, Colorado. Tilson’s Chief Information Officer and Vice President of Consulting resides in our Denver office and is our most senior Tilson presence in the West.

(25) Bow, New Hampshire	(21) Spanish Fort, Alabama	(21) Las Cruces, New Mexico
(19) Miami, Florida	(17) Irvine and San Diego, California	
(15) Clifton, New Jersey	(13) Charlotte, North Carolina	(11) Las Vegas, Nevada

In a tight labor market with low unemployment, most companies struggle to hire at the speed of Tilson. Instead of quantity, Tilson’s hiring challenges are related to candidate quality and basic knowledge about current and emerging technologies, project management, leadership experience and cultural fit.

In 2017, the Wireless Infrastructure Association sponsored the Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program (known as TIRAP) in anticipation of ever-growing workforce demands on the Wireless and Small Cell Construction industry. Tilson was one of the first companies in the country to become a participant in this competency-based apprenticeship, which includes 150 hours of coursework and up-to a 12-month mentor-evaluated on-the-job learning requirement to determine competency. Today, Tilson has almost 80 Tower Climbing Technicians I/II, Antenna and Line Lead and Foreman registered in our apprenticeship program. At Tilson, all Tower Technician I positions are required to be enrolled in our apprenticeship program and all apprentices have an assigned mentor. The starting salary for a TTI-Apprentice with no experience is \$18/hr, and a Foreman at Tilson can make up to \$70k/year. We offer competitive salaries, an excellent healthcare plan and our automatic enrollment 401(k) program with employer contribution regardless of employee contribution demonstrates our commitment to the long term financial health of our employees – our apprentices receive these benefits as well.

Earlier this year, to meet to the administrative and management requirements of an employer-led apprenticeship program, we made two significant moves to enhance and solidify our commitment to training, development and safety. First, we hired a full time Certified Safety Professional as our Manager of Safety and Compliance to oversee apprenticeship compliance, progression and completion. Second, we formalized a partnership with the Maine Community College System to create a web-based TIRAP curriculum accessible to all our tower-climbing crews enrolled in the Tilson TIRAP program.

As I speak, the Maine Community College System is collaborating with my Workforce team to create a four-tier digital Macro-badge which certifies the progress of each Apprenticeship position: Tower Technician I, Tower Technician II, Antenna and Line Lead, Antenna and Line Foreman. We are grateful to

President David Daigler and his Workforce Development Team who were eager to lead us and work beside us tailoring the best web-based, certificate solution for our mobile, nationwide crews.

In the industry, apprenticeship participation is fractured, and employer involvement is inconsistent. I oversee a high-growth company in a high-demand and high-risk industry. Outside of my company, the growth of this industry will require expertly skilled workers who collectively deliver efficient and quality outcomes. They will do this when the industry requires contractors and their employees to meet consistent standards of learning, practical application and commitment to safety. A USDOL Registered apprenticeship program helps in concept. But simply stated, the administrative requirements entail too much management to compel participation of high-growth companies with a national footprint and may dissuade a small business altogether. Coupled with that, insufficient reimbursement incentives will not be a driver of adoption unless they can offset the administrative obligations. Tight schedules, long hours and plenty of work leave little room for uniform employer-led training and development. For 2019 with nearly 80 registered apprentices, Tilson will receive the maximum reimbursement of \$6,000: this covers just 8 apprentices.

Mr. Chairman, like you, I am an Army Veteran. For presumptively the same reasons as you, hiring Veterans is important to me and I have created ways to hire veterans with or without plainly transferrable skills for the merit they bring in supporting Tilson's core values of Safety, Respect, Accountability, Integrity, Professionalism and Composure. At one point, Tilson's veteran population was nearly 50%, but our growth coupled with [thankfully] the lowest national Veteran unemployment rate in my lifetime has made hiring Veterans just as competitive as other growth industries. We participate in the annual Maine Hire-a-Vet campaign and the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) program.

We hire Veteran graduates across the country from both Warriors4Wireless and Airstreams Renewables, which are WIA-approved pre-apprenticeship program providers, but even that hiring depends on matching where we are hiring with where a Veteran wants to live and work.

In March of this year, we made a major benefit investment we believe will increase our ability to recruit and retain all types of employees. We now offer a generous gender indiscriminate parental leave for both the primary and non-primary caregivers. After making our internal announcement, we found that our Tower Climbers were the first to share their appreciation for a leave policy that simply allows this often young and physically exhausted group to spend time with their growing families. We also strengthened our commitment to our currently serving Reserve and National Guard employees by offering 15 days of paid military leave. Their transferrable skills and on-going military training provide an invaluable and incalculable return in exchange for their time away. Thank you for addressing this issue and providing the opportunity to be here and discuss this important topic with you.

Tilson Technology Management is a participating member of the Wireless Infrastructure Association (WIA), a six-year National Association of Tower Erectors (NATE) STAR Initiative member and a member of the National Safety Council. Tilson's VP of Workforce has been a member of the WIA Workforce Committee.

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