

Testimony for the Record
Submitted to the
Committee on Small Business
Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development
for the Hearing
“Avenues to Success: Examining Workforce Training Programs for Employees”
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Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velazquez, and Members of the Committee – Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Neal Strange, and I am Director of Education for the Indiana Kentucky Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship and Training Fund, as well as a 15-year member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. I’m here to provide an overview of our Apprenticeship Program and the continuing education we offer to our members. This program is not just about learning a trade – it’s about ensuring our members are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in an ever-changing industry.

Our council consists of 38,000 members within Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio, and 550,000 members across the United States and Canada. We represent the carpenters, millwrights, piledrivers, and floor layers who are building our country’s bridges, highways, manufacturing sites, hospitals, schools, and power production facilities. On any given project, our members are responsible for approximately 50% of the total construction work, including concrete, structural walls, metal framing, roofing, and the installation of machinery.

At the core of our training philosophy is the belief that our contractors must remain relevant and prepared for both existing and emerging construction markets. To achieve this, we partner closely with contractors, manufacturers, and local universities to meet their specific needs. Together, we provide a robust training curriculum that emphasizes both productivity and safety, ensuring that our members deliver a high-quality product on every job.

One of the greatest strengths of our program is that all training is provided at no cost to our individual members. Funding for our program comes from contributions made for every hour worked on a job site by our signatory contractors. Nevertheless, we lift the financial burden off those contractors, allowing them to focus on project execution

without worrying about additional expenses related to training workers and ensuring their workforce has the proper certifications necessary for specific jobs. Our members benefit from a top-tier education, while our contractors benefit from a highly skilled workforce.

In terms of compensation, our apprentices are paid on a scaled wage basis. The wage structure provides apprentices with fair compensation as they build their skills, which further incentivizes retention and productivity. This model also allows our contractors to remain competitive in the market while employing highly trained and motivated workers.

We offer multiple pathways into our program, creating accessibility for a diverse group of candidates. We have partnerships with high school career and technical education programs, adult education initiatives, state and county reentry programs, and military veteran organizations – such as Helmets to Hardhats and our own internal Military Veterans Program. These pathways ensure that we are tapping into a wide range of talent, allowing for diversity and inclusion in our workforce.

In the past four years, our apprenticeship enrollment has grown by 40%, reflecting both the demand for skilled labor and also the increasing awareness of the opportunities our program offers for career growth and development. Current enrollment across our three states totals more than 6,900 apprentices. This includes 22% minority enrollment and 6% female enrollment.

From the moment an apprentice enters our program, safety becomes an integral part of their education. Beginning with OSHA 10 certification and continuing throughout their apprenticeship, safety protocols are embedded into every aspect of training. A safe worker is an effective worker, and this foundation is key to the longevity of their career and the protection of our job sites.

For members who aspire to advance further in their careers beyond the apprenticeship, we offer additional pathways into leadership roles, project management, and business ownership. Whether a member seeks to move into superintendent or management positions, or has an entrepreneurial spirit and wishes to start their own contracting business, our continuing education resources equip them with the skills and confidence to succeed. We recognize the importance of nurturing leadership from within, and our specialized programs allow our members to thrive in roles that require strategic thinking and operational oversight.

Our program's reach extends beyond training the individual. We play a crucial role in economic development by placing our skilled workers on jobs that span from small business ventures to large-scale, national projects. For smaller contractors looking to explore new markets, we provide access to a pool of well-trained workers who can meet

the demands of these new opportunities. Meanwhile, larger contractors – particularly those involved in mega-projects related to the CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act – also benefit from our training programs. Since 2023, more than 4,500 members within our three-state council have been employed in projects stemming from these acts, including Intel, Ford Blue Oval, and numerous renewable energy projects, covering solar, hydro and wind. These initiatives require a workforce that is both large and highly skilled, which our program delivers.

One of the challenges our small business contractors face is providing adequate support to their workforce, particularly in areas such as travel and childcare. These can significantly impact both employee retention and job satisfaction. The costs and logistics of supporting employees who must travel for work – a necessity in the construction industry – are a burden. A program or initiative that offers financial support or logistical assistance for employee travel would be immensely beneficial. This could come in the form of subsidized travel, tax credits, or even grants that alleviate the financial strain on the business.

Similarly, childcare assistance is a growing concern, especially as more parents are part of the workforce. Small contractors often cannot afford to provide the same level of benefits as larger corporations, putting them at a disadvantage when competing for skilled labor. Childcare support could take various forms, including direct subsidies, partnerships with childcare providers, or flexible childcare solutions like on-site care or tax incentives for companies offering such benefits.

Since our inception in 1881, the UBC has organized the membership necessary to meet contractor and end user needs. Our privately funded training keeps us ahead of the curve. We understand that if our signatory contractors are not successful, we will not be successful. We have no seniority in our Collective Bargaining Agreements and no contractor is bound to employ a member they find unproductive. This competitive environment is necessary for our success. All this is done at no cost to the taxpayer.

In summary, our Apprenticeship Program and continuing education initiatives are designed to support both our members and the contractors they serve. We provide cost-free, high-quality training that focuses on safety, competitiveness, career advancement, and long-term development. By doing so, we help drive economic growth, foster innovation, and build a workforce that is ready to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Thank you for your time. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.