

Testimony of General President Brent Booker

Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA)

United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Hearing on Registered Apprenticeship: Scaling the Workforce for the Future

November 5, 2025

Chairman Cassidy, Ranking Member Sanders, Members of the Committee:

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Brent Booker. I am General President of the Laborers' International Union of North America. LIUNA represents 530,000 proud men and women who are among the most productive, skilled, and safest workers in their industries. LIUNA members, most of whom are employed in the construction industry, have worked on America's largest construction projects, and our apprentices and journeyworkers are an essential part of the nation's workforce.

Thousands of LIUNA members are currently at work on highway and tunnel projects like Gateway in New York/New Jersey and the Frederick Douglass Tunnel in Baltimore. They are working on power plants – including renewable, nuclear and fossil fueled; demolition jobs; water systems; wind and solar energy infrastructure; major building projects from the Buffalo Bills stadium to the Intel semiconductor factory in Ohio; as well as lock and dam upgrades to improve American waterways under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Registered apprenticeship is what allows our union to deliver the skilled Laborers required to complete this essential construction for our country. Our training system is a product of labor-management collaboration. We fund the programs with private dollars that are collectively bargained with our contractors. LIUNA and its employer partners invest tens...of millions...of dollars each year to operate programs in state-of-the-art training centers, which are both permanent and mobile facilities. These serve the training needs of construction laborers in urban, suburban and rural communities nationwide.

The entire reason that building trades unions and their employers established joint labor-management programs in the decades after the passage of the National Apprenticeship Act¹ was to avoid the singular problem: Why would I, as a contractor, invest my time and money training a laborer if they can jump to the competition – who invested nothing – as soon as work picks up? Our labor-management model solves that problem by providing collective funding for a large pool of skilled apprentices available - as needed - to all the employers who participate.

This model has been the gold standard for decades. North America's Building Trades operate the largest Registered Apprenticeship Training system in the U.S., adding an average of roughly 73,000 new apprentices each year since 2018. The Building Trades unions invest over \$2 billion in training and education programs each year, utilizing 1,700 training centers and 20,000 certified instructors.

It is important to understand that this is a private sector solution to the workforce challenges of our industry. Our apprenticeship programs are funded through collectively bargained

¹ National Apprenticeship Act of 1937, Public Law 75-308, 50 Stat. 664, 29 U.S.C. 50.

agreements. A small contribution is made to the jointly managed training fund for every hour a LIUNA member works. Even the curriculum and training schedules are developed in collaboration with contractors who have the best understanding of the skills required from their workforce and the specific project demands. This enables us to plan trainings up to a year or more in advance of labor demand. In essence, the construction hours worked by Laborers finance the current and future workforce that will build America. Every increase in union projects increases our ability to recruit, train, and upskill more laborers.

Make no mistake – successful completion of a union registered apprenticeship often provides a life-changing opportunity for those willing to undertake the challenge.² However, getting new entrants excited about joining the construction industry is often difficult, in part, because of the nature of the industry. The sector is characterized by fluctuating employment, frequent travel, exposure to the elements, and irregular hours. Construction employment is physically demanding and is one of the most dangerous work environments in the country. LIUNA's experience in successfully growing the apprenticeship pool over the last decade rests in extensive investment in programs and partnerships which identify and motivate potential apprentices from all walks of life and from every portion of the population to consider a career in construction.

Apprentices are only as good as the program they are in, and they are only as *successful* as the amount of work on which they can find employment. Quality registered apprenticeship, in other words, is fundamentally about supply and demand.

The supply of safe and skilled workers is our business. It requires significant private investment, a commitment to excellence, and partnership with the business community.

The demand for apprentices depends on a sound economy that attracts investment and on contractors that are likewise willing to invest in talent for the long term. Let me speak to the demand side first.

In the wake of historic public and private investment, the demand for apprentices has grown substantially in recent years. The number of active LIUNA apprentices increased 33% since 2021. We currently have 35,000 apprentices embarking on a career hoping to become a Journeyworker Laborer. But that future is looking more uncertain.

Now, as for the supply side of registered apprenticeship:

² Union programs consistently evidence higher wages for graduates than non-union programs. USDOL, [Living Wages in Registered Apprenticeship Programs](#), January 20, 2025; ILEPI, [Union Apprenticeships: The Bachelor's Degrees of the Construction Industry: Data for the United States, 2010-2020](#), September 23, 2021.

We welcomed President Trump's Executive Order this April calling for the goal of one million new active apprentices in the Registered system.³ We agree that there is assistance needed for emerging industries that wish to build their workforce development model. And there are also efficiencies we can find in the Registered Apprenticeship system, but there are no shortcuts. We believe that there is no need to pivot to some newly invented wheel when the current system is already growing. The national number of active apprentices in all occupations rose by 80,000 (13%) since 2021 - a great deal of that growth is from advanced manufacturing and healthcare. This tells us the system is flexible and scalable.

Maintaining the quality of the registered apprenticeship system is of the highest priority for LIUNA. Any weakening of the standards in our trade would not only be disruptive to a system built over decades, but also dangerous for the men and women on construction sites. In our union, there are over seventy training programs that instruct the next generation of Construction Craft Laborers. This happens in hundreds of hands-on courses, extensive safety and health trainings, and leadership classes covering core areas in at least a dozen construction sectors.

Our labor-management training arm, LIUNA Training, has been a pioneer in occupational standards development, curriculum development, technical education, and instructor certifications for Construction Laborers. LIUNA Training also concentrates on preparing its trainers under the most rigorous third-party accreditation standards. To satisfy training and certification requirements instructors must successfully complete both written and performance assessments that ensure they possess the knowledge and skills necessary to teach the trade to LIUNA's membership.⁴

While construction is somewhat unusual in its volatility and its dangerous worksites, the need for high-quality Registered Apprenticeship standards nonetheless applies to all industries. There are proven active apprenticeships in tech, AI, cybersecurity, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. But there are baseline concerns we have with changes to the Registered system.

The National Apprenticeship Act was passed to benefit apprentices so they are not trapped in low-wage work under the guise of training. Congress must be wary of opening the door to programs that take more from workers than they give. Currently, "individuals who complete registered apprenticeship programs earn an average annual salary of approximately \$84,000, exceeding the average earnings of associate degree holders, which range from \$50,000 to \$56,000 per year."⁵ And government must provide for the necessary enforcement and resources to assure quality in any registered program at either the state or federal level.

³ PREPARING AMERICANS FOR HIGH-PAYING SKILLED TRADE JOBS OF THE FUTURE, [Executive Order 14278](#) of April 23, 2025.

⁴ <https://www.liunatraining.org/>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration/Kansas Department of Commerce, Common Reporting Information System (CRIS), FY2025 Q1 publication, retrieved Feb. 7, 2025.

We believe strongly in a labor-management model. We emphasize that it is the investment of private dollars that drives real workforce development. Employers who are unwilling to put skin in the game are already showing their hand: they want a free ride from taxpayers for their own private benefit. The emerging sectors most in need of high-quality apprenticeship programs include some of the richest companies in the world. They can and should, first, promote excellence in training standards; second, commit to skills that lead to higher wages; and third, do it primarily with their own money!

If we don't fill skill gaps in critical industries such as construction and energy, the U.S. risks losing global competitiveness and leaving workers without viable pathways to living-wage jobs. American dominance in energy and technology relies, at its core, on construction. Mines don't dig themselves. Advanced manufacturing, data centers, and power generation of all types – these industries don't become real without skilled construction trades. And those skilled workers themselves are created through a great investment of time and resources.

There may be no greater American labor-management success story than the vibrant Registered Apprenticeship system built by the union trades over decades. LIUNA remains committed to this successful approach, and commits to helping other industries launch a model to advance both their employers and the workers for whose benefit the Registered Apprenticeship was established.

I look forward to your questions.

LIUNA Training & Education Fund's Apprentices

The LIUNA Training & Education Fund Apprenticeship Programs are registered with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), confirming that they comply with the government's rigorous national standards. Both the commercial and residential construction apprenticeship programs are designed to allow inexperienced workers to begin earning a salary immediately as LIUNA apprentices. Earning while they learn, workers new to our industry participate in on-the-job training that is supported by both classroom and hands-on instruction at a local LIUNA training center.

The Apprenticeship Programs are the foundation of our commitment to meeting the needs of LIUNA's signatory contractors for safe, skilled employees. Contractors who hire apprentices are able to focus on developing a strong team while the apprentices receive the quality training they need at the local LIUNA training center. The result is a workforce that grows with the contractors, understands the operations and works safely to get the job done right the first time.

Participation in the DOL Registered Apprenticeship Programs benefits the apprentice in many ways, including:

- Acquires the skills and competencies necessary for success, without cost
- Provides a competitive starting wage that increases after achieving training milestones
- Participates in classroom and hands-on instruction that complements on-the-job learning
- Achieves certifications that increase employability
- Accesses opportunities for college credit for training achievements

The Apprenticeship Programs also provide many benefits to contractors, including:

- Safe, skilled employees
- Employees who understand the contractors' values and goals
- Payroll savings while the apprentice advances through the program
- EEO requirements are met
- Targeted training for the skills the contractor values most
- No out-of-pocket expense

LIUNA Training's Registered Apprenticeship Programs ensure that new Construction Craft Laborers and Home Performance Laborers receive the quality training they need to be successful in the construction industry today, and in years to come.