

TESTIMONY OF NAARAI NAVARRO

GRADUATED APPRENTICE

PINNACOL ASSURANCE

UNITED STATES SENATE

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR & PENSIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE SAFETY

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GETTING AMERICA READY TO WORK – SUCCESSFUL ON THE JOB,
APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING PROGRAMS TO HELP WORKERS AND BUSINESSES
GET READY TO WORK

Good morning everyone. Thank you for the invitation to speak today. My name is Naarai Navarro, and I recently completed my registered apprenticeship with Pinnacol Assurance in Denver, Colorado, and became a full-time journey-worker as a Business Development Representative at Pinnacol.

Before my apprenticeship, I didn't know what my path was going to be. I probably would have just picked something, and gotten stuck in something that isn't fulfilling. That's what a lot of people my age do. They don't feel like they have options. But because of my apprenticeship, I do feel like I have options. Because of my apprenticeship, I have experience, confidence, a career path and the ability to provide for myself. Today, I'd like to tell you how my apprenticeship has impacted my life and my family's life.

I grew up in Denver, Colorado, with my mom, dad, three brothers and one sister. My parents primarily spoke Spanish.

Growing up, I heard from a lot of adults that work experience was very important to finding a good career later on. I wasn't the type of person that wanted to go to college before I knew what I needed from my education—I wanted to figure out what I wanted to do before spending a lot of money on college.

When I was in high school, I didn't know what I wanted to do for a career. School felt like I was learning things without any context and without any connection to reality. I tried several other ways to not be in the school setting, such as a welding class and an internship. Then my high school coordinator, Suzy, suggested that I do an apprenticeship. I need to say a big thank you to her because if not for her I wouldn't have tried to do the apprenticeship and I wouldn't be here today.

I did my apprenticeship at Pinnacol Assurance, an insurance company in Denver. When I began my apprenticeship, I spent half my days in my high school classes and half my days at work. I was attracted to the apprenticeship at Pinnacol because of the different career pathways that were open—I started on the marketing team and spent a year with them, and then did a year with the claims team. At Pinnacol, about five percent of the workforce are youth apprentices, so I had lots of other young people to learn with.

Through my apprenticeship and my training, I've learned a lot of skills. Time management is a big one—when I was in high school, there weren't really repercussions if you showed up late or didn't meet a deadline. At work, I need to meet a deadline, so I know how to get up and prepare before meetings and make sure my assignments get done. From this, my teachers commented that they noticed that I became much more mature and responsible at school.

I've also become much more confident about public speaking. Without my apprenticeship training, I definitely wouldn't be here and speaking with you today. Overall, I really like meeting new teams and learning new things. In the beginning, it's always stressful for me when I'm going through training and learning lots of new things. But then as I grasp those things, I feel really accomplished and I know I'm ready for more and more. And then we go through training again, and then my supervisors at Pinnacol say they know I'm ready for more work and that I'm an expert, and it feels really rewarding.

One of my proudest moments at my apprenticeship was when two other apprentices and I managed a full claims queue. We were the only ones in charge—we scheduled our own meetings and reached out to our supervisors when needed. Through this work, I really saw that we were trusted - just like the adults around us.

When I started my apprenticeship, my parents were hesitant because they wanted me to go to college. When I told them my plan and we went through the pros and cons, they started to get on board, and I promised them that I would get hired full-time, and recently I *was* hired into a full-time role...and they were so proud of me.

I'm also leaning toward going to college now that I know what I want to do with my career. My company will help pay for my tuition, so I won't have any debt. I've already earned a community interpreter certification in Spanish, as well as a property casualty insurance certification and I'm aiming towards a bachelor's degree.

Because of my apprenticeship, I've been able to move out of my parents' house and get my own place and my own space. I might be able to get a new car soon. Other internships and jobs I had before this were all at a set wage with no opportunity for promotion, no hope of a real career or a better future. My apprenticeship has been very different, and allowed me to become a fully-trained, full-time employee with the ability to provide for myself.

I want this committee to know that my apprenticeship has changed my life. Having the opportunity to work and be trained while still in high school has given me the confidence and professionalism to be successful in whatever I want to do. It's been a wonderful experience, and I hope that more businesses hire high school apprentices so that other students can have the same opportunity that I have had. Thank you.