

Committee Members,

Thank you for the honor of speaking before you today. My name is Erik Elzy, I am a proud 26-year member of United Association of Plumbers, Pipefitters, & HVACR Service Technicians of Local 502 in Louisville, Kentucky. I have held various positions in my local union including, apprentice plumber, journeyman plumber, general foreman, superintendent, apprentice instructor, training coordinator for Local 502's training center, instructor nationally for the United Association, and Business Representative, the job I currently hold.

I am here today to speak to you on the importance of apprenticeships in the construction industry, especially the industry I represent. My experience started in 1997 as a registered apprentice. I worked under the tutelage of many passionate, educated plumbers and plumbing instructors for 5 years until I met the requirements to graduate in 2002. The passion these members have shown me, led me to return the passion to young men and women currently making up Local 502's membership as an apprentice instructor, and as their training coordinator so I could have a hands-on experience in their education. Some of these members are still my mentors today, and I am forever indebted to them for the education they provided to me when I was a young man.

I have been appointed to several boards representing Local 502 in the state of Kentucky, either by the Business Manager of my union, or Governor Andy Beshear. Some of these being, Greater Louisville Building and Construction Trades Council (Vice-President), Kentucky State AFL-CIO Executive Board member, and Department of Housing Building and Construction Advisory Committee. I can assure you that among other topics covered in the meetings of these committees, the conversation seems to always find its way to worker shortages in the state of Kentucky and we bounce ideas around the room on how each organization is planning to make sure manpower requests are met now, and in the future, which always includes apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships are required to register with the state in which they are located, as well as the DOL, thus having them prove how money is spent, retention rates, and provide their curriculums for approval, among other things. This helps ensure that registered apprenticeships meet required levels of quality and that member's contributions- or in some cases federal and state grants- are used responsibly.

With my experience as an apprentice instructor and training coordinator locally, I have personally witnessed how valuable the education provided to our apprentices shows, versus when someone who has taken a 6-week course to pass a license exam or someone whom has worked in the field for a few years with no other education than field work, shines through. Most union apprenticeships, have "earn while you learn" programs. This allows the apprentice to take classroom/ work shop learning and translate into their field of work, and vice versa. This is also a great way to learn for someone who is more of a hands-on learner. All while maintaining full time employment and benefits to provide for themselves and if applicable their families.

Apprenticeships have proven to be very beneficial to businesses both large and small. Larger businesses, in some cases, are capable of developing "in house" apprenticeships, while smaller businesses may not be able to afford to perform this type of training on their own. In the case of Local 502, we partner with contractors that have anywhere from 350 Local 502 members, down to 2 members. We are able to help all contractors – notwithstanding their size- following one guiding principle: We train apprentices to perform a job skill, not a job skill for a certain type of contractor.

Some smaller businesses in years past have been intimidated to approach unions with the fear of the cost of becoming a union company. In recent years Local 502 has seen a rise in smaller contractors becoming signatory, this is from the education they are receiving at our apprenticeship. We offer a class to every member on starting a new business and how Local 502 can assist in the financial burden of someone starting out. Since implementing this class, we have had several members take this class, and have had 5 members start new businesses.

Recently, Congress enacted legislation regarding infrastructure. This one bill will require hundreds of thousands of qualified workers for the foreseeable future. One-way Congress could help with this shortage I believe, is to help promote apprenticeships in the work force, as a career choice the same way a four-year degree is promoted. In my profession, people have chosen to become a Plumber, Pipefitter, or HVACR Technician, no different than choosing to become a Doctor or Lawyer. The education is different, but not less important. In fact, in our opinions, the education is more important to the health and safety of Americans.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today, it has truly been an honor and privilege.