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Before the
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives

Reauthorizing the National Apprenticeship Act:
Strengthening and Growing Apprenticeships for the 21st Century

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Chair Davis, Ranking Member Smucker and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the National Apprenticeship Act and the need to strengthen and grow the use of apprenticeships in our country. I am Morna Foy, the president of the Wisconsin Technical College System. I am also a board member of Rebuilding America's Middle Class, or RAMC, a nationwide coalition of community colleges seeking to ensure Federal policy addresses the needs of our students.

We very much appreciate that the focus of today's hearing is on registered apprenticeship. Wisconsin has a state-registered apprenticeship program, which is administered by our Department of Workforce Development. Wisconsin boasts over 11,000 active registered apprentices in professions ranging from carpenters to financial specialists to medical assistants to arborists.

A Shared History

Registered apprenticeship and the Wisconsin Technical College System have a long, successful and intertwined history in Wisconsin. Apprenticeship programs were largely unregulated in the United States until Wisconsin passed the first state apprenticeship law in 1911. The Wisconsin law became the foundation for apprenticeship laws in other states and eventually the National Apprenticeship Act.

That same year, 1911, was also the year that Wisconsin's system of trade and evening schools — the precursors to our current technical college system — was first established. In fact, the schools were created, in part, to address the need for classroom instruction for Wisconsin's new apprenticeship system.

Today, Wisconsin's technical colleges work closely with the Department to provide 65 percent of the related classroom instruction for registered apprentices. Currently, our technical colleges provide classroom instruction for 77 distinct apprenticeship programs. Eleven of the seventy-seven are new as of 2014 and encompass areas as diverse as healthcare, IT and agriculture. Five more are under development and slated for completion this year. (See

Attachment A.) Over the past five years, participation in our classroom programs for apprentices has grown to almost 7,600 individuals.

Strong Support

Apprenticeship receives extensive support in Wisconsin. First, it has always enjoyed broad bipartisan support among policymakers. Second, and most importantly, our employers support it. Apprenticeship programs are a great way to match workers with the skills that employers need. More recently, apprenticeship has become an invaluable means to address the pressing demographic reality for our employers. Like many states, Wisconsin is challenged with an aging workforce coupled with fewer high school graduates. Employers struggle to find employees with the right skill sets. When they do find them, they compete to keep them. With apprenticeship, employers get talent immediately and employers' investment in apprentices (e.g., often tuition, books and materials, etc.) helps to retain workers. Data shows that 99 percent of our apprenticeship completers remain working in Wisconsin, with 58 percent in the technical college district where they received their training, many of which are in the rural communities of our state.

Workers benefit too. Apprentices begin earning immediately, are paid their wages during classroom instruction per Wisconsin statute, avoid college debt and have an on-ramp to lifelong learning. Apprentices completing their program and the related classroom instruction at our colleges report an annual median salary of $80,344, which is more than twice the median annual income for an individual in Wisconsin.

Alignment with Higher Education

Wisconsin Technical Colleges excel in aligning apprenticeship with higher education. Let me share a few examples:

<u>Youth Apprenticeship and Dual Credit</u>

Apprenticeship and educational attainment are closely connected at the high school level. In Wisconsin, the Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program is open to high school students after completion of their sophomore year. Related classroom instruction is provided by K-12 partner schools. Our technical colleges, through agreements with local school districts, award dual credit to youth apprentices. High school students enrolled in YA have the opportunity to receive:

- A high school diploma,
- College credits from a local Wisconsin technical college, and
- A certificate of occupational proficiency (YA certificate) from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

In addition, if a student continues on as a registered apprentice, their YA work hours can be applied to a registered apprenticeship program. Over the past five years (2015-2019), 1,371 public and private Wisconsin high school students participating in YA were awarded 5,174 Wisconsin technical college credits.

Registered Apprentices and Higher Education

Registered apprentices successfully completing both the work and classroom requirements are awarded a nationally recognized apprenticeship completion certificate by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. For those who wish to continue their education after completing a registered apprenticeship — nearly half of recent completers were considering doing so — the successful completion of most apprenticeships in Wisconsin is recognized as 39 credits towards a 60-credit associate's degree in Technical Studies at our technical colleges. Apprentices can complete this 60-credit associate's degree by earning 21 general studies credits, many of which are offered online. Completion of this associate's degree can then lead to transfer opportunities at several four-year institutions in Wisconsin as an individual's career progresses.

In the above example, the "traditional" associate's degree was earned after the completion of the apprenticeship program. Recently, we have begun designing our new apprenticeship programs with a traditional degree "embedded" as part of the apprenticeship program. In these cases, apprentices earn a technical diploma in their profession in tandem with — rather than after — completion of the apprenticeship credential. This is particularly helpful in professions, such as medical assistants, where national certification exams and accreditation bodies guide the design of program requirements. This model is strongly supported by industry sponsors who want employees with educational and career pathways beyond the completion of the apprenticeship, itself.

A Postsecondary Perspective

Wisconsin has been successful in aligning apprenticeship and higher education because we have connected the technical colleges as the primary provider of classroom instruction for apprentices since the inception of the apprenticeship program. As a result, Wisconsin technical colleges bring a postsecondary perspective and expertise to the development of related classroom instruction for apprenticeship curriculum and design.

Classroom instruction for an apprenticeship program is first developed on a statewide basis, using the broadest common denominator. Unique classes can be added by our colleges to the statewide program as needed by a sponsoring employer. We use the same statewide data system to document both apprenticeship and academic program curriculum.

As with our academic programs, our apprenticeship curriculum is developed on a competency and learning objective basis. This enables us to easily construct a crosswalk between apprenticeship and academic programs, building multiple pathways between the two. We also use this system to grant credit for prior learning.

Finally, our colleges have had consistently strong relationships with employers. Advisory committees made up of faculty, local employers and industry experts meet regularly to ensure that our curriculum — whether developed for apprentices or academic program students — is designed to keep pace with employer needs and the rapid pace of change in industry.

Reauthorization
The National Apprenticeship Act — which has largely been untouched since its passage in 1937 — contains elements that should be maintained to ensure quality and good program outcomes, as well as areas that require added flexibility so apprenticeship can more easily align with higher education.

We support a strong role for the U.S. Department of Labor and a continued state and Federal partnership. The state-registered apprenticeship system works well for Wisconsin and should be maintained.

To encourage better alignment of apprenticeship and postsecondary attainment, reauthorization should acknowledge the role of higher education in apprenticeship. First, a separate, statutory formula program for states should be created to support the engagement of two-year institutions of higher education in the development and delivery of related apprenticeship instruction, especially in new sectors. Second, an interagency agreement should be established between the Federal departments of Labor and Education as acknowledgement that apprenticeship is more than just workforce development. Apprenticeship — as the Wisconsin model has shown — is a highly effective, cost-neutral path to postsecondary credential attainment, individual learning and career success.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. I hope my perspective from Wisconsin adds value to your discussions as the legislative process moves forward. I would be pleased to answer any questions at the appropriate time.

Attachment A
Wisconsin Technical College System
New Apprenticeship Programs Since 2014

Currently Approved

- Arborist
- Biotechnology Lab Support Assistant
- Facilities Maintenance Technician
- Financial Services Representative
- IT-Broadband Technician
- IT-Data Analyst
- IT-Service Desk Technician
- IT-Software Developer
- Mechatronics
- Medical Assistant
- Organic Vegetable Farm Manager

Under Development

- Autobody Collision Repair
- Community Health Worker
- Highway Maintenance Technician
- Industrial Metrology
- Pharmacy Technician

WISCONSIN
TECHNICAL COLLEGE
SYSTEM