

Building U.S. Infrastructure by Leveraging Demands for Skills (BUILDS) Act

Summary

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Background:

Our nation’s infrastructure is in dire need of repair. In February 2021, the American Society of Civil Engineers graded 11 of 17 of our nation’s infrastructure categories a “D+” or worse based on capacity, condition, future need, operation and maintenance, public safety, and resilience.

Investments in our aging infrastructure are critical and the investments in our people who will repair and rebuild it are just as important. According to a report from the Departments of Labor, Transportation, and Education, we need to increase our infrastructure workforce by 4.6 million workers by 2022 just to keep pace with current and projected hiring needs. Although the need to invest in infrastructure goes back decades, there is renewed momentum today, especially as more than 10 million people remain unemployed across the country as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The current economic crisis has exacerbated the inequities facing women, people of color, and other individuals who have historically faced barriers accessing employment.

Any investment to improve our nation’s transportation and infrastructure systems and transition to a clean energy economy could create millions of new jobs, requiring skilled workers to fill them. But infrastructure investments have not always been paired with support for training and services that help individuals take advantage of new employment opportunities. Congress must invest in the creation of a diverse pipeline of workers with skills necessary to access these in-demand jobs.

The BUILDS Act will support workforce development in the transportation, energy, construction, and other targeted infrastructure industries by:

- **Providing grants to industry partnerships**, which bring together local businesses and industry organizations, workforce boards, labor, education institutions, community-based organizations and training providers to support workforce training programs in infrastructure-industry jobs. Congress requires states and local areas to support the development of these partnerships under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), but no dedicated funding has been provided for these activities.
- **Expanding access to paid, on-the-job training programs that respond to local workforce needs.** The industry partnerships will help small and medium sized businesses navigate the process to develop Registered Apprenticeships and an appropriate curriculum for on-the-job learning, help recruit individuals, especially those who have faced barriers to employment, and help train managers to serve as mentors to work-based learning participants.
- **Providing support services to workers**, through pre-employment services like skills training, adult basic education, work attire and tools, child care, transportation; early employment support like mentoring, targeted training, and case management; and continuing employment services for a period of at least six months to make sure the worker succeeds in the new role.

If you would like additional information, please contact Maxine Sugarman in Congresswoman Bonamici’s office at Maxine.Sugarman@mail.house.gov.