

Promoting Apprenticeships through Regional Training Networks for Employers' Required Skills (PARTNERS) Act

Introduced by: Reps. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), Brett Guthrie (R-KY), and Drew Ferguson (R-GA)

The Problem

Registered apprenticeship programs are a proven strategy to fill job openings, develop a pipeline of skilled talent in a range of industries, and increase opportunities for workers to earn while they learn and get a good-paying, family-sustaining job. Unfortunately, small- and medium-sized businesses, which employ a vast majority of the United States' private sector workforce, often cite high upfront costs and time commitments as deterrents for establishing and running registered apprenticeship programs. These challenges ultimately result in fewer pathways into middle- and high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industries, sectors, and occupations.

Small- and medium-sized businesses serve as local economic engines and contribute significantly to the livability, prosperity, and character of their local communities. Without direct support for establishing partnerships that can facilitate the development of Registered Apprenticeship programs, create work-based learning curricula, and provide workers with support services to remain in and complete workforce development programs, small- and medium-sized businesses will continue to struggle with recruiting and retaining a diverse, prepared workforce.

The Solution

The *PARTNERS Act* would establish a grant program to support the creation and expansion of industry and sector partnerships to help small and medium sized businesses develop work-based learning programs and provide mentoring and support services for workers. Specifically, the *PARTNERS Act*:

- Authorizes 50 percent of the funds deposited into the Department of Labor's H-1B Nonimmigrant Petition Account for use by the Department of Labor for partnerships grants, resulting in no additional cost to taxpayers.
- Creates a formula grant program for states, administered by the Department of Labor, using the same allocation formula as Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, for states to provide grants of up to \$500,000 for three years to eligible partnerships between small- and medium-sized businesses, educational institutions, workforce development boards, industry organizations, and other entities. The funds would support small and medium-sized businesses in establishing or expanding work-based learning programs and providing support services for workers.
- Allow eligible partnerships receiving a grant to fund a range of activities, including:
 - Recruitment of participants for paid work-based learning programs, with a focus on SNAP and TANF recipients;
 - Connecting with education providers to develop classroom instruction to complement on-the-job learning;
 - Assisting with the design and development of work-based learning curriculum;
 - Serving as employer of record for workers in the work-based learning program during the transitional period before the business hires the individual for permanent employment;
 - Providing education and skills development to managers and front-line workers who will train or mentor workers in the learning program;
 - Providing career preparation activities; and
 - Navigating the Department of Labor's apprenticeship registration process.
- Require eligible partnerships receiving a grant to fund support services for workers, including:
 - Adult basic education classes;
 - Pre-work-based learning or training or pre-apprenticeship programs;
 - Mentorship and retention support services; and
 - Access to tools, work attire, transportation, child care services, and other items required for employment.