



The Wireless Infrastructure Association

March 21, 2025

Chair C. T. Wilson
Vice Chair Brian M. Crosby
House Economic Matters Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Testimony in Support of SB 431 – RAISE Act

Dear Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and distinguished members of the House Economic Matters Committee:

My name is Tim House. I am the Executive Vice President of [The Wireless Infrastructure Association \(WIA\)](#). We appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of this important legislation.

WIA represents more than 200 companies that design, build, operate, and support the telecommunications networks we use every day. I also happen to be a proud resident of the State of Maryland, so I have a dual interest in these proceedings.

WIA represents the companies that make up the wireless broadband infrastructure ecosystem in the United States. Our members are the businesses that develop, build, own, and operate that nation's wireless broadband infrastructure, including connecting it all with fiber. WIA member companies include wireless carriers, infrastructure providers, and professional services firms that collectively own and operate more than 135,000 telecommunications facilities around the globe and employ tens of thousands of people.

The combination of major government and private investment in broadband and 5G is creating opportunities in scores of entry-level and more advanced occupations in planning, building, maintaining, and supporting these networks. The negative side of this

opportunity is that there is a major skills gap that must be addressed, and it is not just in the initial and entry level functions of construction.

WIA would like to offer its support and assistance to help Maryland address these challenges -- and take full advantage of this opportunity to create attractive careers for citizens of the state in an important American industry.

All over the country WIA members and our partners in related industries are encountering the same three broadband workforce challenges:

- a shortage of skilled labor.
- the well-developed training and educational workforce ecosystems in each state do not include or address telecommunications.
- the companies that build and operate our telecommunications networks do not have a history of collective and collaborative activity at the state and regional levels in workforce matters, much less with government.

Broadband, and the broader telecommunications industry, of which it is a key part, have not yet been addressed by the traditional workforce and training structures in most states, nor has the industry been exposed to them. The strong public-private partnerships developed for other industry sectors at the state and regional level do not include telecommunications and its employers. For that reason, the staff and training systems are not experienced in, and do not address telecommunications and relevant subject matter. A key strategic goal should be to embed telecommunications in this infrastructure as rapidly as possible. A rapid buildup of capacity for all these is required to take advantage of this opportunity and challenge. This is a national challenge, not unique to any particular state.

A successful telecommunications registered apprenticeship plan requires that these challenges be overcome. We need to incorporate a telecommunications specific focus into the existing workforce development system in order to build a skilled, diverse and resilient workforce. Embedding telecommunications in Maryland's workforce infrastructure, starting with registered apprenticeship, is a worthy and urgent goal to which we pledge our support.

I come before you today to offer strong support for this important legislation. At the outset, I would like to say we have had excellent reception and conversations with the experienced and committed leadership on these matters in Maryland, from legislators with longstanding commitment to registered apprenticeship (in the state and the nation), to leaders in the executive branch like Chris MacLarion, Director of the Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program.

Maryland faces a major challenge. You have set a very high bar for the role of registered apprenticeship in our state. As the sponsors of the legislation and the Apprenticeship Commission have recognized, these aggressive goals can only be achieved by major expansions of registered apprenticeships in new, “non-traditional industries,” outside of the traditional construction building trades.

We believe telecommunications is one of those. We think telecommunications is a perfect industry in which to create a model for rapid registered apprenticeship expansion.

In short, we would like to replicate with the Maryland Department of Labor the highly successful registered apprentice partnership we have had with the United States Department of Labor for the past several years, during Administrations of both political parties.

Unlike most other trade associations, and certainly any other one in telecommunications, WIA has made a major commitment to industry workforce development. This began in 2017 with registered apprenticeship and expanded into a major program of training courses that we call the Telecommunications Education Center (TEC).

For several years WIA has been the National Sponsor of the highly successful Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program (www.TIRAP.org), approved and funded in part by the US Department of Labor. TIRAP now has 107 employers participating, offers 16 USDOL-approved registered apprentice occupations, and has produced almost 6000 apprenticeships. WIA runs an intensive national educational and outreach program to recruit telecommunications companies to participate in TIRAP and then works hand in glove with them to implement tailored apprenticeship programs. I have attached more details about TIRAP as an appendix.

In 2020, WIA was awarded a four-year contract by the DOL to serve as the official national Industry Intermediary tasked with working with telecommunications companies to expand Registered Apprenticeships. As the DOL’s Industry Intermediary, WIA can offer incentive funds to employers in the telecommunications industry that adopt Registered Apprenticeship and serve under-represented communities. WIA partners with employers to provide resources and guidance to help them improve and formalize their existing training, so they can offer national credentials from the DOL to successful apprentices.

WIA is the DOL’s contracted Industry Intermediary tasked with working with telecommunications companies to expand Registered Apprenticeships. Through TIRAP, WIA provides companies with the resources, guidance, and support to improve and formalize their training programs, expediting employer adoption of Registered Apprenticeship Programs and enabling them to offer national credentials through the DOL.

We also have extensive state workforce experience. Prior to the initiation of the federal broadband grant program, BEAD, WIA got a head start in statewide broadband/5G workforce development by helping Ohio develop a successful model of a state-driven telecommunications/broadband workforce program. In September 2021, Ohio Lt. Governor Husted announced the establishment of the Ohio Broadband & 5G Sector Partnership using traditional workforce funding sources. The Sector Partnership is housed at The Ohio State University with leadership from WIA as the Industry Intermediary, and with full participation by the relevant state workforce agencies.

Since the partnership was launched, Ohio has announced 11 new workforce programs across the state. These programs are located at career centers, colleges, and universities, and will prepare participants for a variety of jobs in the telecommunications industry. The Sector Partnership continues to lead the development and distribution of additional education and training programs across the state. Here is a link to a brief video describing the program [Ohio Broadband & 5G Sector Partnership](#) with WIA and Ohio State University. Ohio's Broadband and 5G Workforce Strategy Report is also available: [Broadband & 5G Workforce Strategy Report](#). The program has been funded from other sources to date. Ohio is proposing to spend between \$40 million and \$50 million of its BEAD deployment funds (5-7 percent of its \$800 million BEAD allocation) to expand the workforce programs designed to date.

As the US Department of Labor's National Sponsor of the Registered Apprenticeship Program for the telecommunications industry, WIA has the expertise to help States improve and expand apprenticeship programs in telecommunications to build a highly skilled telecom workforce. As an Industry Intermediary, WIA can, on its own and/or in partnership with others in the state:

- Recruit and convene employers, including national companies as well as local contractors— to identify high-demand occupations, validate competencies, and expand Registered Apprenticeships in telecommunications.
- Administer incentive funding for employers adopting and expanding the Registered Apprenticeship model for broadband occupations (as we have with DOL funds).
- Provide technical support and resources to help companies establish on-the-job training as well as classroom learning for their apprenticeships.
- Build pre-apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship programs in technical schools and community colleges.

WIA is the leading developer of training and curriculum for the broadband industry, offering 35+ courses through our Telecommunications Education Center (TEC) tailored to the industry's training, education, and professional development needs. See <https://wia.org/telecommunications-education-center/> Further, WIA's Broadband & 5G Readiness Program is a first-of-its-kind program that provides an industry-approved curriculum on the design and deployment of 5G/broadband infrastructure. The fast-track training is packaged for companies and education institutions to attract and train candidates for careers in broadband and 5G. We have partnered with the Fiber Broadband Association and the Power Communications Association to offer the training content that they have developed to our participating employers.

If the proposed legislation passes WIA would be honored by the opportunity to partner with the State of Maryland to make it a roaring success.

Under this legislation, we understand that WIA would be eligible to participate in two ways: (1) as a registered apprenticeship program "sponsor," and (2) as a "qualified intermediary." We are excited about the legislation because we believe that partnering with the State and our industry, WIA can lead an intensive program to create an effective apprenticeship program in Maryland in this critical US industry -- which is foundational to so many other sectors of the economy.

We offer a full registered apprenticeship program of 16 occupations ready to go. You don't have to recreate the wheel. We know how to successfully accomplish the hardest part of an RA program in a "non-traditional industry": selling employers on RA; recruiting the employers to participate; and making it easy for them to do so.

We look forward to working with you to make this legislation a success.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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Appendix A: Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program (TIRAP)

The Wireless Infrastructure Association's (WIA) Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program (TIRAP) is a USDOL registered apprenticeship program designed to prepare individuals for careers in the telecommunications industry. TIRAP, facilitated by WIA, provides apprentices with a combination of hands-on training and classroom education. The program emphasizes key principles such as competitive wages, workplace safety, skills enhancement, equal employment opportunities, job quality, and job security. Through TIRAP, apprentices gain the necessary expertise to pursue fulfilling and sustainable careers within the wireless infrastructure sector.

WIA currently has 16 occupations approved under its USDOL National Registered Apprenticeship Program Standards, including Broadband Technician, Fiber Optic Technician, and other high-growth roles. The program was created in 2017 and continues to expand with support from key partners. To date, WIA has 107 participating employers and 504 active apprentices across the US and its territories, having served 5972 apprentices historically. WIA recently completed a DOL Closing the Skills Gap grant and is in its fifth year with DOL as an Industry Intermediary Contractor. This work resulted in a nationwide network of registered apprenticeship program stakeholders across industry, state and local governments, education providers, and employers. While TIRAP is a national model, WIA accrued key experience assisting small and medium sized employers with developing and registering their own local RAP standards where desired, sharing best practices for program implementation.

As part of TIRAP, WIA provides technical assistance and support to its employer partners in leveraging the apprenticeship model. Through regular contact with participating employers, WIA recurrently gathers industry research and employer input to shape the priority for new occupation and career path development. By hosting quarterly employer forums, WIA facilitates sharing of best practices among employers of all sizes.