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June 9, 2021

The Honorable Peter DeFazio  
Chairman  
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Apprenticeship Requirements in the *INVEST in America Act*

Dear Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves and Members of the Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure:

On behalf of the Independent Electrical Contractors (IEC), I am writing to express our concern with workforce requirements included in the *Investing in a New Vision for the Environment and Surface Transportation (INVEST) in America Act*. While IEC supports the Committee's efforts to address the nation's surface transportation infrastructure, it is concerned that its apprenticeship mandates leave many contractors on the sidelines while also failing to expand apprenticeship opportunities for women and minorities.

Established in 1957, Independent Electrical Contractors is a trade association representing 3,300 members with more than 50 chapters and training centers nationwide. Headquartered in Arlington, Va., IEC is the nation's premier trade association representing America's independent electrical and systems contractors. IEC National aggressively works with the industry to establish a competitive environment for the merit shop—a philosophy that promotes the concept of free enterprise, open competition, and economic opportunity for all.

IEC is uniquely situated to comment on the apprenticeship provisions in the *INVEST in America Act*. For decades, IEC has been at the forefront of the industry providing highly skilled electricians through its registered apprenticeship program. An IEC apprentice is able to earn while they learn, incurs little to no debt and enters into a well-paying job upon graduation. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the median salary for an electrician in 2020 was \$56,900. In addition to being certified by DOL's Office of Apprenticeship and 38 State Apprenticeship Councils, the American Council on Education (ACE) has recommended that students that graduate the IEC apprenticeship program be eligible for 41 semester hours of college credit. IEC is also a member of DOL's Registered Apprenticeship – College Consortium (RACC), a national network of postsecondary institutions, employers, unions and associations working to create opportunities for apprentice graduates who may want to further enhance their skills by completing an associate's or bachelor's degree. RACC members have their programs evaluated by a third-party organization to determine the college credit value of the apprenticeship completion certificate. During the 2021-2022 school year, IEC's merit shop contractors and chapters will educate nearly 14,000 electrical apprentices across the country.

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As crafted, the *INVEST in America Act* would require construction contractors to meet various apprenticeship requirements in connection with certain grant funding. The bill requires that the contractor “employs qualified apprentices from traditionally under represented populations, including women and minorities.” It also mandates that qualified apprentices account for not less than 15 percent of the total labor hours on the project.

IEC chapters and contractor members are constantly recruiting qualified individuals from all walks of life to its registered program. While we share the Committee’s interest in continuing to grow a diverse workforce, it does not believe that accomplishing this through government mandates is the best way to achieve this. By including such requirements, the Committee is favoring large contractors at the expense of smaller operations, many of which are women and minority-owned businesses. By limiting the ability of small contractors to compete, the Committee is depriving these contractors the opportunity to grow their business and additional apprenticeship opportunities that would become available to under represented populations.

IEC also has concerns with the federal government dictating to contractors how they should specifically allocate their workforce on a given project. Since each job is different, IEC believes it is best left up to the contractor to decide the proper mix of journeymen and apprentices and not burden them with an arbitrary percentage. Requiring a specific amount of labor hours be performed by registered apprentices will once again benefit the larger contractors that are better able to allocate their labor accordingly with the smaller contractor less equipped to meet the bill’s 15 percent requirement.

IEC’s merit shop electrical contractors welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee on the *INVEST in America Act* and upgrade our nation’s surface transportation infrastructure. However, we urge the Committee to reject the bill’s arbitrary and harmful apprenticeship requirements that will limit competition and do nothing to expand opportunities for under representative populations.

Sincerely,  
Jason E. Todd  
Vice President, Government Affairs  
Independent Electrical Contractors