



August 25, 2021

Trade Schools and the Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program

Our traditional educational system leaves too many people behind and locks them out of the mainstream economy. We must connect people to new opportunities that gives them hope and can end the ongoing violence in Chicago. That is why I chaired a Hearing this week of the House Appropriations-Higher Education Committee to hear testimony about how opening more trade schools can help many people attain a trade that leads to a high-paying job that can support their families and their dreams.

In the last few weeks, I toured an aviation trade school in Chicago – the Aviation Institute of Maintenance – that trains mechanics for United, American, Southwest. I also met with an Illinois trade school – Escoffier School of Culinary Arts – which is headquartered in Schaumburg and trains chefs and culinary professionals. Trade schools should be a foundational part of our education system, opening doors for young adults to pursue well-paying careers that are in demand.

Illinois had a long tradition of effective vocational schools, including Chicago’s Washburne Trade School, which served to train thousands of skilled workers through a public-private partnership with public educators, building contractors and trade unions. Our Hearing discussed the possibility of how Illinois can reinstitute trade schools and reengage young adults to consider a trade career. We also heard from representatives from area unions.

While college can be a tremendous path for many, it doesn’t have to be the only way to have a successful future. There is a need for a renaissance of trade schools here in Illinois, and it’s time we begin to invest in this economic generator that will profoundly impact communities across our state.

On August 6, 2021, Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) announced the launch of the new Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program, leveraging a \$10 million commitment from the State to provide additional training programs that will expand the talent pipeline while boosting diversity within the construction industry and building trades. A Notice of Funding Opportunity ([NOFO](https://www.illinoisworknet.com/WIOA/Resources/Documents/Illinois%20Works%20Pre-apprenticeship%20-%20202614-1994.pdf) is at <https://www.illinoisworknet.com/WIOA/Resources/Documents/Illinois%20Works%20Pre-apprenticeship%20-%20202614-1994.pdf>) released by the DCEO Illinois Works Office aims to expand access to training programs that will prepare residents for well-paying jobs in the trades – with plans to focus on reducing barriers to entry and increasing representation of women and people of color in these fields.

"Our new pre-apprenticeship training program is designed to help more Illinois residents, especially those from underrepresented populations, benefit from jobs created by our historic Rebuild Illinois capital plan – building a strong talent pipeline and career paths for those who need them most," said Sylvia Garcia, Acting Director of DCEO. "Working alongside training organizations, our partners in labor and members of the legislature – the new Office of Illinois Works is aiming to not only boost capacity, but diversify the construction and building trades here in Illinois."

I applaud these efforts, and working hard to keep unions accountable to accept well-trained Blacks into their ranks will be key to the success of trade schools and pre-apprenticeship programs.

I agree with my colleague in the House, State Representative Will Davis, who said, "The Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship program has been desperately needed in the State of Illinois for decades. For too long, Black men and women have faced incredible barriers to accessing the high-wage, middle class careers available in the building trades. In creating Illinois Works, it was and it is my hope that increased opportunities for training, along with established goals for apprenticeships on our capital projects, will turn around this historic inequity."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District