



IBEW POLICY BRIEF

Chapter 4: Protecting Labor Standards and the Rights of Working People

As a labor union, the IBEW is a leading voice for working families. The IBEW focuses on improving the lives of IBEW members and powering an economy that works for everyone. The IBEW advocates for high-road labor standards policies that include, for example:

- Prevailing wage requirements
- Project labor agreements (PLAs)
- Apprenticeship utilization requirements
- Local hire provisions
- Labor Peace Agreements
- Worker misclassification

The IBEW applauds the numerous steps taken by the Biden administration to improve and protect unions and the rights of working people.³ We will continue working with the Administration and Congress to advocate for policies safeguarding organizing and collective bargaining rights. We will also continue to ensure that federal investments in infrastructure include requirements to utilize registered apprenticeships and other high-road labor standards policies. Policies in federal legislation that protect workers create high-quality union jobs and helps to advance equity and justice.

Pending Priorities

The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act

Support for unions has grown recently, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The August 1, 2022, Gallup poll showed approval for labor unions at its highest point since 1975, with 71 percent of those polled voicing their approval.⁴ Yet, despite this robust and growing support, the share of workers represented by a union is only around 10 percent.⁵

³ *President Biden's First 18 Months: Assessing the Biden Administration's Record for Workers*, Economic Policy Institute Report (Aug. 25, 2022),

⁴ Although statistically similar to last year's 68%, it is up from 64% before the pandemic and is the highest Gallup has recorded on this measure since 1965. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/398303/approval-labor-unions-highest-point-1965.aspx>

⁵ The 2022 unionization rate (10.1 percent) is the lowest on record, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>



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In recent decades, anti-union interests have eroded federal labor laws. This deterioration has made it increasingly difficult for workers to win union representation and have their voices heard.

In 2021, lawmakers introduced the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, legislation that would bolster workers' rights to organize and make classification rules for independent contractors more stringent. In addition, the PRO Act would impose harsher punishments for employers violating workers' rights. For example, the bill would allow workers to override right-to-work laws, protect the right to strike, and prevent employer interference in elections. The bill also includes civil penalties of up to \$50,000 per violation of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), double civil penalties of up to \$100,000 for repeat NLRA violations and civil penalties against directors and officers.

The PRO Act passed in the U.S. House of Representatives on March 9, 2021, but failed to pass in the Senate. However, President Biden has been a vocal supporter of unions and the right to organize. The Biden administration issued a policy statement supporting the bill the day before it passed in the House.⁶

The IBEW continues to advocate for the passage of the PRO Act and any opportunities to include similar provisions in new legislation.

Reauthorization of the National Apprenticeship Act

The IBEW is actively pushing Congress to reauthorize the National Apprenticeship Act. Advocacy efforts include any opportunities for similar provisions in any new legislation. Over five years, the National Apprenticeship Act would create nearly one million new openings for:

- Registered Apprenticeship Programs
- Youth Apprenticeship Programs
- Pre-apprenticeship Programs

The National Apprenticeship Act would provide jobs through a \$3.5 billion investment to registered apprenticeships to scale-up apprenticeship opportunities. In addition, the legislation would streamline access to apprenticeships for workers and employers. It will also expand apprenticeships into new in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

The Registered Apprenticeship system is America's most successful federally authorized workforce development program. According to the Department of Labor, 94 percent of people who complete registered apprenticeships are employed upon completion, earning an average starting wage of above \$70,000 annually.

Investments in apprenticeships not only pay off for workers and employers, but they also benefit taxpayers and construction project owners. Increased spending on apprenticeship programs is

⁶ Office of Management and Budget, Statement of Administration Policy: H.R. 842 – Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2021 (March 8, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SAP-HR842.pdf>.

more than offset by several factors. These factors include higher tax revenues, reduced spending on public-assistance programs, increased worker productivity and reduced safety incidents.

Apprentices from registered apprenticeships are adequately trained and always work under the supervision of journey-level workers. Apprenticeship requirements mitigate safety risks and improve project quality. In addition, research has shown that these requirements generally increase the number of project bidders and reduce bid costs.⁷ Numerous studies have shown that these programs improve diversity and equity within the construction workforce.⁸

Apprenticeships are vital to creating a strong economy and rebuilding the middle class and are the most effective, time-tested method of training electrical workers in an industry replete with physical hazards.

Utilizing Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) ensures that trained, highly skilled professionals perform work. RAPS provides a reliable supply of workers that can complete construction projects, thereby ensuring a return on public investment.

The National Apprenticeship Act was written closely with the IBEW and North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU).

Chapter Resources

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Registered Apprenticeship System Resources:

Press Release: As Nation Faces Record Unemployment, Bipartisan Group Unveils Legislation to Expand Apprenticeships, Invest in Workforce Training	https://edlabor.house.gov/media/press-releases/as-nation-faces-record-unemployment-bipartisan-group-unveils-legislation-to-expand-apprenticeships-invest-in-workforce-training
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⁷ See, e.g., U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Task Force on Apprenticeship Expansion: Final Report to the President of the United States* (2018), <https://omb.report/ocr/201812-1205-001/doc/88448201> (apprenticeship programs increase productivity and are a “key tool for addressing America’s skills gap.”); U.S. Department of Commerce and Case Western Reserve University, *The Benefits and Costs of Apprenticeship: A Business Perspective* (2016), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED572260.pdf> (apprenticeship programs are cost-effective due to higher worker productivity, improved safety and project quality, reliable project staffing, and reduction in employee turnover).

⁸ See, e.g., Frank Manzo and Robert Bruno, *The Apprenticeship Alternative: Enrollment, Completion Rates, and Earnings in Registered Apprenticeship Programs in Illinois*, Illinois Economic Policy Institute (Jan. 2020), <https://illinoisepi.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/ilepi-pmcr-the-apprenticeship-alternative-final.pdf>; Larissa Petrucci, PhD, *Constructing a Diverse Workforce: Examining Union and Non-Union Construction Apprenticeship Programs and their Outcomes for Women and Workers of Color*, University of Oregon, Labor Education and Research Center (2021), https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.uoregon.edu/dist/a/13513/files/2021/11/Constructing_A_Diverse_Workforce.pdf.

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Construction, Labor Standards &
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