



December 3, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
317 Russell Senate Office Bld.  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
322 Hart Senate Office Bld.  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
1233 Longworth House Office Bld.  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
235 Cannon House Office Bld.  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Minority Leader Pelosi:

As job creators always seeking to expand the pool of skilled labor for our businesses and industries, we applaud prison reform efforts, such as those written into the bipartisan *FIRST STEP Act*, which will provide job training, treatment, and rehabilitation programs to the countless individuals currently cycling in and out of America's jails and prisons. Enabled by the bill's reforms, our businesses and trade associations will be able to implement our own job training programs behind prison walls to ensure that incarcerated individuals are learning skills that are specifically tailored to the jobs we have difficulty filling and can transition successfully from "Prisons to Paychecks."

The dearth of skilled labor is a very real challenge for employers across the United States. In fact, the labor shortage in this country is at a critical point: for the first time this year, there were more job openings than there were eligible workers to fill them. At the end of September 2018, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported 7 million job openings; meanwhile, the latest unemployment statistics from BLS puts the number of people out of work at 6.1 million. Industries such as trucking, construction, and manufacturing are desperate for good workers, and would welcome the opportunity to offer second chances to incarcerated individuals seeking to turn their lives around.

Take, for example, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), which is experiencing labor shortages in all specialties and trades, such as framing, carpentry, bricklaying/masonry, concrete, drywall, roofing, plumbing, painting, electrical, and HVAC services. Today, the NAHB estimates there are almost 300,000 unfilled construction jobs across the country, and the number of jobs to be filled is expected to grow to almost 750,000 by 2026. And this doesn't just impact home builders: the ever-growing labor and subcontractor shortages and associated costs impact home prices, which means every American struggling to buy that first home will find that dream further and further out of reach.

The numbers in manufacturing are even more daunting: according to one study, the country will face a need for 3.5 million manufacturing jobs over the next decade, and because of the lack of skilled labor, 2 million of those jobs will go unfilled. Further, one of the co-authors of that study

specifically noted that traditional methods of recruiting and developing workers would no longer be sufficient to serve the future of manufacturing.

That is why chambers of commerce and business leaders in states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, and Kentucky have strongly supported state criminal justice reform efforts that break down barriers to employment for the formerly incarcerated, and why the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has gone one step further by endorsing the *FIRST STEP Act*, which will help ensure that incarcerated people are job-ready before they take their first steps of freedom.

We join with these business leaders to urge lawmakers at the state and federal level to support prison reform policies like those included in the *FIRST STEP Act* that will help evolve prisons and jails into tools of rehabilitation and workforce development, and we encourage others to join us in this effort. Not only is this good for our industries, it will also benefit public safety. After all, when incarcerated individuals can successfully transition from “Prisons to Paychecks,” they are far more likely to turn away from crime for good.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers  
National Association of Home Builders  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce  
Arizona Free Enterprise Club  
Connie Wilhelm, CEO, Home Builders Association of Central Arizona  
Don Finkel, CEO, American OEM  
Gene Barr, President & CEO, Pennsylvania Chamber of Business & Industry  
Guy Ciarrocchi Esq., President & CEO, Chester County Chamber of Business & Industry  
Kalamazoo Probation Enhancement Program  
Kansas Chamber of Commerce  
Kentucky Chamber of Commerce  
Kevin Schmidt, Executive Director, Ohio Cast Metals Association  
Lincoln Trail Home Builders  
Stephen Waguespack, President & CEO, Louisiana Association of Business and Industry  
Matt Smith, President, Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce  
Michigan Association for Community Corrections Advancement  
Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce  
West Michigan Policy Forum