



1.31.22 – NYS Legislative Testimony

**Testimony Provided by Martha Ponge, Workforce
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Good afternoon, my name is Martha Ponge, and I serve as a workforce development consultant and former Director of Apprenticeship for the Manufacturers Association of Central New York (MACNY), and I work with seven regional manufacturing associations statewide. Collectively we represent more than 5,400 manufacturers and businesses and over 181,300 manufacturing jobs. Our work through the Manufacturers Alliance Intermediary Apprenticeship Program, known as MIAP, continues to be the gold standard of training for employers while supporting equitable access to registered apprenticeship for all individuals, regardless of their work experience or academic qualifications.

The employment disruption caused by the pandemic has provided a unique opportunity for manufacturers to recruit unemployed and underemployed individuals. Employers continue to look to the Alliance, in their role as trusted partners, to facilitate the recruitment, upskilling and retention of these new workers. With more than 50,000 open positions in high demand, manufacturing, and technology sectors, it is critical that MIAP continues this important work.

COVID exposed the fragility of careers in many industry sectors. The unemployment rate as of

December 2021 was still 6.6% in NYS, significantly higher than the national average. Leveraging the knowledge that manufacturing and high-tech fields have successfully emerged from the pandemic to continue to provide employment opportunities, we need to expand our investment in apprenticeships to combat both high unemployment and the increasing needs of our manufacturers in New York State. As we also tackle the low GDP growth in New York State, we should recognize that for every \$1 invested in manufacturing, \$2.79 are infused back into the regional economy. A \$1 million investment by the State Legislature has a potential 280% ROI for the state.

Although New York State has one of the strongest anti-discrimination job policies in the country, large social and economic disparities exist. All New Yorkers should have access to high paying, high-quality jobs. Currently, 51% of New York State residents earn less than \$40,000 per year. With access to careers in manufacturing, with an average annual salary of \$71,000 / year, the potential to nearly double annual income is achievable. While all New Yorkers should have access to high paying jobs, this isn't always possible. Two out of 3 jobs in New York State currently require some type of post-secondary education or a post-secondary certificate. To build the workforce of tomorrow – education is essential. Apprenticeship not only provides a nationally recognized certification but also access to a terminal degree, primarily at the cost of the employer. The earn and learn model is the original way to provide upward movement between education and career.

In December of 2021, MACNY was named a partner with the National Institute for Innovation and Technology that was awarded a contract by the U.S. Department of Labor to expand the use of Registered Apprenticeships to provide better access to careers in strategic supply chains for all workers, but especially underrepresented populations. The funding, approximately \$9.5 million over 4 years, will be used to expand

registered apprenticeships in Nanotechnology and Semiconductors and other related industries. It is the only program of its type in the nation targeting the semiconductor and nanotechnology sectors. As the Governor moves to bring a new national semi-conductor technology center and additional chip fabs to NYS, MIAP will continue to be the connector between individuals looking for work and the high paying jobs in industries of the future, especially those sectors, like semi-conductors, that support national security and global competitiveness.

Youth unemployment remains a challenge. MACNY and the Alliance Partners are focusing on youth programming that helps youth to recover from the pandemic and get on the road to success. Our Alliance Partner in Rochester, RTMA, will provide youth apprenticeship opportunities at over 30 companies for 350 students in 2022; an increase of over 100% from the previous year. MACNY recently announced its own pilot youth program launching in Spring of 2022. Our downstate partners in New York City and Long Island are actively engaged in scaling this outreach to youth with a laser focus on students and families from minority and low- and moderate-income communities.

The unemployment rate for individuals who identify with a disability is currently nearly 17%, and as such, another area we are focusing on is our work with the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council and The University of Rochester, Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities. The pre -apprenticeship training builds upon the existing Project Search Program and creates pathways into advanced manufacturing for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, ages 18-24. In 2022, the first cohort of high school students will begin to participate in this program. This three-year grant affords us the opportunity to expose employers to many more fully qualified candidates, further expand the state's technical pipeline, and position NYS as the model for employment of individuals with disabilities.

Rounding out our commitment to building Diversity Equity, Inclusion and Access within manufacturing is Operation Next. Operation Next is a contract in partnership with the Department of Defense and Lightweight Innovations for Tomorrow (LIFT). Op Next serves transitioning military personnel, as well as their dependents, and prepares them for the most in-demand manufacturing jobs across the nation. Operation Next's hybrid curriculum allows participants to learn online through simulations and multimedia and then demonstrate their new skills on real world manufacturing equipment with regional employers during their last six months of military service. By leveraging the partnerships that already exist within MIAP, our goal is to move transitioning military and their dependents directly into apprenticeships and keep their talent in New York State.

Our funding has remained flat for the past few years at \$750,000 and was eliminated in this year's Executive Budget. To continue this highly successful and effective program and meet the growing needs across the state as illustrated in my testimony, we respectfully request a modest increase to \$1 million dollars in funding to sustain and further grow MIAP.

Thank you.