



November 18, 2018

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator,

On behalf of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), a national construction industry trade association with 70 chapters representing nearly 21,000 chapter members, I write today in support of S. 3649, the *FIRST STEP Act*, introduced by Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa). This bipartisan bill seeks to address the important issue of prison reform, with the goal of lowering recidivism rates by better helping incarcerated individuals prepare to reenter their communities.

This bill will help the Bureau of Prisons conduct at-risk assessments for all newly incarcerated individuals, and develop plans and strategies to reduce each persons' chance of recidivism. One important aspect of the bill is to offer vocational and educational support to teach prisoners a skill to improve their chances of securing a job once released. S. 3649 recognizes the need for flexible education methods by allowing industry-sponsored organizations to offer development programs that result in industry-recognized credentials or certifications. In the construction industry, more than three quarters of skills education and workforce development is done by industry-lead methods; by allowing industry recognized curriculum to be taught in prisons, we can ensure that these men and women are learning skills that are in-demand and result in stackable, nationally portable credentials.

According to economic data, 500,000 construction jobs are ready to be filled right now and that number will increase with economic growth and forthcoming federal infrastructure legislation. That is why it is so important that we teach individuals in prison the most in-demand skills so they can learn a craft, become a valuable commodity in the labor market, and secure a steady job.

Currently, ABC and its members across the country are working to give men and women a second chance. For example, ABC of Baltimore partners with ProjectJumpstart, a 14-week construction training program in Baltimore, MD that uses industry-recognized curriculum to teach carpentry, electrical and plumbing. Once an individual completes the program, JumpStart works with area employers to hire graduates to set them on a path beyond an entry-level position. Since 2006, JumpStart has graduated more than 650 Baltimore residents, with more than 150 companies participating which has resulted in a 75% job placement rate. Programs like this would not survive without flexible, industry-recognized training methods.

We thank you again for your attention to this matter and urge the swift passage of S. 3649. We look forward to working with you to ensure every American has the opportunity to build America.

Sincerely,

Kristen Swearingen
Vice President of Legislative & Political Affairs