



WSLC Workforce Development News

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WINTER 2026

News in Workforce Development from the Voice of Labor



Building Trades Members at work, photo courtesy of WSBTCTC

WASHINGTON'S BUILDING TRADES JOB SHORTAGE

Guest Column by Heather Kurtenbach, Executive Secretary of the Washington Building and Construction Trades Council

Over and over, we hear there is a “skilled labor shortage” in construction, and that we simply don’t have enough skilled workers to meet demand. But we see a very different reality every day as the people who train and represent this workforce.

At the start of 2025 — with only 75% of our affiliated unions reporting — nearly 9,955 union construction workers in Washington were out of work. That number includes more than 1,700 apprentices who are still trying to complete their required hours but can’t get dispatched to job sites. And on top of that, more than 8,000 Washingtonians are on wait lists to get into union construction apprenticeship programs.

You don’t end up with almost ten thousand skilled workers out of work — and over eight thousand waiting to start an apprenticeship — because of a labor shortage.

You end up with numbers like that when the job pipeline dries up.

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Washington has one of the strongest union apprenticeship systems in the country. These programs are rigorous, jointly overseen by labor and employers, and designed to meet industry demand. They attract thousands of applicants each year — people who want stable careers, family-supporting wages, and the chance to work in a trade where skill really matters. But that system depends on one essential ingredient: consistent work.

When apprentices cannot get the job hours needed to complete their training, programs cannot responsibly bring in new applicants. When workers sit on out-of-work lists for months at a time, families suffer. The problem isn't that Washington lacks people who want to build. The problem is that there are not enough jobs for them to go to. This false narrative of a "skilled labor shortage" threatens our ability to deliver on the state's biggest priorities — housing, transportation, clean energy, climate resilience, and public infrastructure.

At the Washington State Building and Construction Trades Council, we represent 48 Building Trades unions throughout the state. Across these trades, we have the capacity to build what Washington needs. We have the talent, the interest, and the training. We are always ready. What we don't have is a reliable flow of projects that keeps the workforce moving from one job to the next without long gaps in between.

"We have the talent, interest and the training. We are always ready."

Pathways to the trades don't begin with recruitment; they begin with employment. It doesn't matter how many people want to join a trade if the existing apprentices can't finish their training because there isn't enough work.

If Washington wants to meet its infrastructure goals and continue training the next generation of skilled workers, the solution cannot be found in recruiting more workers or standing up more apprenticeship programs. The solution is far simpler: create jobs.

Let's be clear: Washington doesn't have a skilled labor shortage. Washington has a job shortage.

Heather Kurtenbach is the Executive Secretary of the Washington State Building and Construction Trades Council representing union members in the Building Trades across the state. [Read more](#) about the WSBCTC.

Welcome, Shondea Chapman!

The WSLC is pleased to welcome Shondea Chapman to the team as the newest Workforce Development Director. She brings with her decades of experience through her work in the community and technical colleges system, in her recent roles at the Workforce Education Service Department at Bates College. Chapman's expertise in helping working people succeed in their careers and her commitment to union work will enrich the work of the Workforce Development Department in supporting and empowering working families across the state. [Read more](#) about Shondea's experience here.



Labor Leader Spotlight: Charlotte Murry

Charlotte Murry shared her journey as a labor leader in workforce development. Murry sits on the Snohomish Workforce Development Council and is a leader in her community. She is also the Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Snohomish & Island County Labor Council, AFL-CIO.



What was your first job and what did it teach you about work?

My first working experience was in food services where I learned about being a team player. Like in a union, we had each other's back. I also learned what "ad hoc" meant and was cross trained as a pizzaiolo, and learned about food safety, health codes & more.

What drives you in your role as a union leader in workforce development?

My drive is to see all people thrive in any career path they take and understand the union difference. I believe it is important to educate all people on the importance of union jobs and apprenticeships and how college is not the only pathway to good paying jobs and good benefits. I have seen so many young people graduate from college only to be strapped to debt for a decade or more. I have also seen first-hand how a union apprenticeship can be the launch pad to economic stability and growth.

What do you wish people knew about the work that you do?

Being part of my local workforce development board has been an amazing opportunity to connect with people in many communities across Snohomish County and provide a labor lens to the work we do. It opens the door to conversations and understanding how organized labor influences job creation and living wages.

What are you working on now that you're most excited about?

I am working on my second Apprenticeships for Young Adults "Lunch & Learn" event. This program is a quarterly virtual meeting to continue educating organizations working with young adults (18-24 years of age) in Snohomish County about different registered apprenticeships and how to navigate to success.

WARN CHANGES IN WASHINGTON STATE

Last year, Washington joined a handful of other states in enacting a state version of the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act. The federal WARN Act, passed by Congress in 1988, requires 60-day advanced notice for certain large layoff events or pay in lieu of notice. Its intent is for workers to have time to prepare for unemployment, seek new jobs or enroll in school.



Washington's law expands the instances when advanced notification is required, requires additional information from companies and authorizes the WA Employment Security Department (ESD) to penalize companies that are out of compliance.

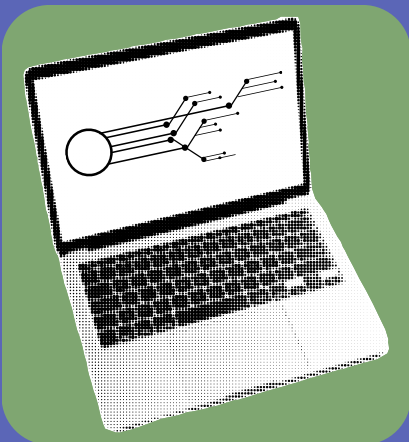
Also new in our state, ESD now publishes the WARN letters received from employers, with all personal information redacted.

For more information about Washington WARN requirements: [WARN requirements](#) | [Employment Security Department](#)

For the database of WARN letters received: [Worker adjustment and retraining notification \(WARN\) layoff and closure database](#) | [Employment Security Department](#)



AI (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE) AFL-CIO POLICY



In October, the AFL-CIO released the “Workers First Initiative on AI,” introducing principles for a collaborative approach between employers and unions to ensure workers benefit from AI. Included in the AFL-CIO’s priorities around workforce development is the use of joint labor-management partnerships and union-centered, high-quality training programs when developing AI workforce training or digital literacy programs.

Read the full report: [Artificial Intelligence: Principles to Protect Workers](#) | [AFL-CIO](#)

WORKFORCE PELL EXPANDS FINANCIAL AID SUPPORT

The newly approved Workforce Pell grant program expands federal financial aid to short-term, career-focused training that helps workers quickly gain in-demand skills while meeting employers' urgent talent needs. Signed into law earlier this year, the program supports training programs lasting 8 to 15 weeks and requires strong employment, earnings, and completion outcomes.

Workforce Board Director of Workforce System Advancement Marina Parr told lawmakers that Washington is especially well prepared to implement and evaluate the program. The state already assesses thousands of postsecondary programs under WIOA and publishes results on its Career Bridge portal, which could also flag eligible Workforce Pell programs for students.

Early analysis indicates that about 100 short-term programs in Washington may qualify, including dental assisting, emergency medical technician, information security, and machining technology. State agencies are working with the Governor's Office to coordinate rollout, with grants potentially available as early as July 2026.

For more information: [Workforce Watch](#).

TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE (TAA) PROGRAM

Entered into termination phase in July 2022, TAA remains in legislative limbo as efforts to reauthorize it continues in Congress. In April 2025, Senator Gary Peters introduced the TAA Reauthorization Act of 2025 (S. 1449), aiming to extend the program through 2031 to support workers displaced by trade-related impacts. The bill proposes restoring critical services such as job training, relocation assistance, and extended income support, which historically helped over 5 million Americans since the program's inception in 1974. Although the TAA program is in termination phase, congressional leaders are still working to reauthorize and modernize the TAA program.

In the meantime, the WSLC Workforce Development Team continues to support workers and employers by assisting with the filing of TAA petitions, and providing technical guidance and advocacy to ensure affected workers can still initiate the certification process. Since termination, the team has helped file about +24 TAA petitions covering approximately +3,933 workers and their families across Washington State. These workers are currently awaiting congressional reauthorization of the TAA program so the USDOL can issue determinations.

You can help! – contact the WSLC immediately if you hear of any possible layoffs affecting your community.

Workforce Training Outcome Data

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The WA State Training and Education Coordinating Board, per statute, regularly publishes labor market outcome data and economic impact information for all major workforce training programs in the state. Information is included for apprenticeships, community & technical college programs, Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs and others.

For more detailed information: [Workforce Training Results](#) | [Washington Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board](#)

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Staying up to date on recent developments and a range of perspectives is vital to our work of uplifting the voices of and supporting working people across the state. We strive to keep plugged in to local and national research and current thinking in the field of workforce development and to share these resources with our community.

Apprenticeship Research Brief - 2025

Washington Student Achievement Council

State Opportunity Index

Strada Education Foundation



WA Clean Energy Technology Report

Clean Energy Technology Workforce Advisory Committee

Mark Your Calendars

[Enlighten Women's Forum](#)

March 11, 2026

Clover Field Technical College

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THE FOUNDATION FOR WORKING FAMILIES is a non-profit organization established by the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO and its affiliates to assist union families when they need it most. Donate to support the mission below.

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