

Congressman Eric Burlison (MO-7)
Chair, Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy
Policy, and Regulatory Affairs
United States House of Representatives
1108 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Congressman Maxwell Frost (FL-10)
Ranking Member, Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy
Policy, and Regulatory Affairs
United States House of Representatives
1224 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

STATEMENT OF MR. TODD DILLENDER
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
CALIBER COLLISION

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH, ENERGY POLICY, AND REGULATORY
AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

**“OPENING DOORS TO OPPORTUNITY: THE PROMISE OF EXPANDED SCHOOL
CHOICE AND ALTERNATIVES TO FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREES”**

On behalf of Caliber Collision, I would like to thank Chairman Burlison, Ranking Member Frost, and all the members of the House of Representatives Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Todd Dillender, and I am the Chief Operating Officer at Caliber Collision, the nation's largest auto body and collision repair company. In my day-to-day role, I oversee over 1,800 centers across 41 states, supporting more than 30,000 teammates who deliver safe, high-quality repairs and outstanding customer experiences. I also oversee Caliber's Technician Apprentice Program (TAP), which has become one of the most impactful workforce development pipelines in the collision repair industry.

My own journey is proof of what apprenticeships and pathways can achieve. I began my career in this industry at the shop level — working with my hands, learning from experienced mentors, and growing step by step into leadership roles. Today, as COO, I carry with me the lessons of those early years and the responsibility of making sure the next generation has even greater opportunities.

Caliber is proud to have a strong presence in your districts. In Chairman Burlison's district, we operate 6 centers employing more than 50 teammates, where 2 apprentices have already graduated through our Technician Apprentice Program (TAP). Beyond workforce impact, these centers have restored more than 26,000 lives in the past year alone — a reflection of the families and communities we serve every day.

In Ranking Member Frost's district, Caliber employs over 53 teammates across 3 centers, and Orlando has become a hub for advanced services like glass repair and vehicle calibration. Here, too, TAP is thriving: 6 graduates are already working as full-time technicians, while 2 apprentices are currently training alongside mentors. Collectively, our teammates in Ranking Member Frost's district have restored more than 88,000 lives in the past year alone, providing not only safe and reliable repairs but also reinforcing our commitment to the local communities we call home.

These graduates, trainees, and the lives restored in their districts are proof that when opportunity is accessible, young people can launch careers, support their families, and strengthen their communities.

The Value of Educational Alternatives

At Caliber, we see every day the need for strong alternatives to the traditional four-year college degree. The American economy depends on skilled trades, yet the pipeline of trained workers is not keeping pace with demand.

Across industries — from construction to manufacturing to transportation — the shortage of technicians has reached critical levels. In the auto body repair sector specifically, the challenge is urgent. According to the TechForce Foundation, the collision repair industry will need more than 100,000 new automotive technicians between 2024 and 2028 just to meet demand and replace those retiring from the field.¹

Traditional pathways are not filling this gap. Four-year colleges provide important opportunities for many students, but they are not designed to deliver the hands-on technical training required in our field. At the same time, the cost of college continues to rise, leaving graduates with an average of more than \$30,000 in student debt.²

Technical schools and vocational programs are also a common way for technicians to enter the industry, and they do valuable work. Many graduates from these programs arrive with a strong foundation in theory, safety, and basic repair techniques. But even then, most still require an additional one to three years of apprenticeship-style training before they can operate as full technicians. What programs like Caliber’s TAP provide is that real-world, structured experience from day one — the bridge between the classroom and the shop floor.

In other words, while trade schools and colleges produce excellent candidates, these candidates still benefit enormously from time spent in programs like TAP. It’s that combination — education plus on-the-job mentorship — that turns potential into mastery and ensures a steady pipeline of fully qualified technicians.

The result is a disconnect between what young people are offered and what our economy urgently needs. At the macroeconomic level, this shortage reduces productivity, increases costs for businesses and consumers, and slows economic growth. At the personal level, it leaves too many young people without a clear, affordable pathway to a career.

Apprenticeships fill this void by combining classroom instruction with immediate, paid, real-world experience. They offer young people the chance to earn while they learn, to build confidence and skills, and to enter the workforce without debt. For many, it is not just an alternative to college — it is the best path to a stable, rewarding career and a better life.

One apprentice put it this way: *“College didn’t feel like an option. TAP gave me a paycheck, healthcare, and the tools to build a career. It was the first time I felt like the future was in my hands.”*

Caliber’s Technician Apprentice Program (TAP)

In 2023, Caliber’s first apprentice graduated from our Technician Apprentice Program (TAP). That milestone marked the beginning of what has become one of the largest and most impactful workforce pipelines in the collision repair industry. Since that day, more than 2,300 apprentices

have graduated and at any given time between 1,300 and 1,800 are enrolled and training across the country.³

TAP is designed differently than traditional programs. It is competency-based — apprentices progress when they demonstrate mastery of a skill, rather than waiting for a set number of classroom hours to pass. Most complete the program within 12 to 18 months, depending on their pace. From day one, apprentices are placed in a Caliber center alongside an experienced mentor. Their days begin where the real work happens: disassembling vehicles, prepping for repairs, assisting in welding or refinishing, and gradually taking on more complex responsibilities like structural repairs, diagnostics, and advanced driver assistance system (ADAS) calibrations. Every week, mentors track their progress against a structured curriculum, ensuring steady growth in technical skill, safety, and teamwork.

One graduate described their experience this way: *“On my first day, I thought I’d just be watching. Instead, my mentor handed me a wrench and said, ‘You belong here.’ That changed everything.”*

The benefits of TAP extend well beyond training. Apprentices are paid from day one — in Texas, they average about \$18 an hour while in the program. They also receive healthcare benefits, a critical support for many young people and their families. Perhaps most importantly, Caliber provides each apprentice with a full set of professional-grade tools, worth thousands of dollars. For most, that expense would be an insurmountable barrier to entering the trade; through TAP, it becomes a launchpad instead. Graduates emerge not just with skills, but with certifications, experience, and the confidence to succeed in a growing industry. Unlike many of their peers who pursue a four-year degree, they enter the workforce debt-free, employed, and on a clear career path.

I’ve seen this transformation firsthand. One of the very first apprentices from the shop I managed years ago recently reached out to tell me he had purchased his first home. He said that without TAP — the paycheck while he trained, the tools that gave him confidence, and the mentorship that kept him on track — he never would have imagined reaching that milestone so quickly.

While Caliber’s Technician Apprentice Program is among the largest in the industry, it is not alone. Other collision repair organizations are also investing in apprenticeship-style models. That matters, because it shows this approach is not a one-off — it is a scalable framework the entire industry can use to meet workforce needs. The examples I’ve shared today are from Caliber, but they are representative of what is possible across the collision repair industry.

Graduation Moments

Graduation from TAP is celebrated with the same pride and excitement as a college commencement — because for many apprentices, it is the defining educational milestone of their

lives. Families gather, mentors cheer, and apprentices walk across the stage with a sense of achievement that goes beyond completing a program.

By the time they graduate, apprentices already have their full set of professional-grade tools — provided early in the program so they can learn, contribute, and succeed from day one. What they receive at graduation is just as powerful: an industry-recognized certificate that signals to employers anywhere in the country that they are fully trained and ready.

We hope they choose to stay with Caliber — and many do. In fact, while the collision repair industry often sees annual turnover rates of 30–40% among entry-level technicians, TAP graduates stay with us at higher rates.⁴

For families, these ceremonies are deeply meaningful. One mother told me through tears: *“This is the first graduation our family has ever attended. My son now has a career, and we have hope for the future.”*

An apprentice from Florida described it this way: *“Walking across that stage wasn’t just about finishing the program — it was proof that I had a skill no one could take away, and a future I could count on.”*

Graduations also send a signal to the broader community. Younger siblings see what’s possible, schools see the value of preparing students for apprenticeships, and mentors feel pride in watching their investment of time and energy turn into the success of the next generation.

At Caliber, we celebrate these moments because they represent the true spirit of TAP: building confidence, creating careers, and restoring opportunities for families across America.

Preparing the Next Generation: K–12 Engagement

Some of our most successful apprentices come directly from high school. Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs that emphasize hands-on experience, shop classes, and early exposure to the trades consistently produce candidates who thrive in TAP. We have seen students who might have been overlooked in a traditional academic setting find purpose and pride in repairing cars, learning teamwork, and mastering complex technology.

Caliber actively partners with local schools to provide career days, shop tours, and direct recruiting into TAP. We would welcome even deeper collaboration with K–12 systems — for example, more resources for CTE instructors, modernized equipment in high school shops, and greater emphasis on connecting students to apprenticeship opportunities before graduation.

One CTE teacher told me, *“My students don’t always see themselves as college material. But when they see a program like TAP, it flips a switch — suddenly they see themselves as professionals.”*

The Economics of Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are not just good for students — they are good for the economy. A Texas Workforce Commission study, conducted with Lightcast, analyzed Caliber’s TAP program and found remarkable returns (see Appendix A):

- Each apprentice generates \$39,542 in added annual income for Texas businesses.⁵
- Over a career, an apprentice generates an additional \$540,332 in lifetime earnings compared to what they would have earned without completing the program.⁵
- Taxpayers gain \$206,013 per apprentice in public sector savings and added tax revenue.⁵
- For society as a whole, the gain is more than \$3.2 million across each apprentice’s working life.⁵

By the end of 2024, TAP had served 848 apprentices in Texas alone (of which 559 had successfully completed or were still in the program), supporting \$22.1 million in added income and nearly 300 jobs across the state. But it’s important to emphasize: this is just Texas.

Nationally, Caliber has already graduated more than 2,300 apprentices and has another 1,300–1,800 in training at any given time across 41 states.³ If these results were scaled nationwide, the economic and social impact would be transformative — a pathway to prosperity not just for apprentices, but for their families, local communities, and the American economy as a whole.

Engagement with Trade Schools and Higher Education

Caliber values trade schools and community colleges, and we often recruit graduates from these programs. They provide a strong foundation in theory, safety, and basic repair techniques. However, what students often lack is real-world, production-driven experience. That is where TAP bridges the gap.

By pairing apprentices with seasoned mentors, we accelerate the move from classroom learning to mastery in live repair environments.

We are also building partnerships with two- and four-year institutions to provide pathways for continued growth — for example, management courses or advanced technical certifications. The future workforce will need both hands-on skills and business acumen, and we see value in integrating both.

One graduate described it best: *“In school I learned the basics. In TAP, I learned how to make it real.”*

Changing Lanes: A Pathway for Service Members and Families

Another way we address the workforce shortage is through our *Changing Lanes* program, which serves as a feeder into TAP. Changing Lanes is designed for active-duty service members in their final months of enlistment, as well as their spouses. Participants receive training in collision repair and refinishing so that when they transition out of the military, they do so with a career already underway.

We know military families often face unique challenges: frequent moves, disrupted careers, and uncertainty after service. By extending this program to spouses, we provide portable, family-sustaining skills that travel wherever life takes them.

To date, Changing Lanes has prepared **hundreds of service members and spouses** to transition into TAP and careers in collision repair.⁶

One Army veteran told me, *“When I left the service, I worried about starting over. This program gave me a career I could count on and a way to provide for my family.”*

Technology, AI, and the Future Workforce

Vehicles are changing faster than at any time in history. Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), electric vehicles (EVs), and artificial intelligence (AI) are reshaping how cars are built, repaired, and maintained. Repairs that once required only mechanical skill now demand a combination of craftsmanship, digital fluency, and technical precision. For Caliber, this means apprenticeships must not only teach today’s skills but also prepare technicians for the challenges of tomorrow.

That is why we are integrating AI and digital tools directly into the repair process. From real-time repair guidance to calibration accuracy checks and AI-driven estimating, these technologies are becoming a natural part of the technician’s toolkit. Apprentices trained in this environment learn to see technology as an assistant — a way to enhance accuracy, speed, and confidence — not as a replacement for their craft.

And the craft itself has become extraordinarily technical. Today’s vehicles are essentially driving computers — built with aluminum, high-strength steels, carbon fiber, and plastics that each require unique repair protocols. A repair that is correct for a Toyota Corolla may not apply to a Ford F-150 or a Tesla Model Y. Technicians must learn not only the mechanics but also the materials science, the electronics, and the software that make each vehicle safe.

That is why Caliber doesn’t treat training as “one size fits all.” Through TAP, apprentices can pursue specialized tracks — body repair, glass replacement, ADAS calibrations, or mechanical repair — each with its own certifications and skill requirements. Within those tracks, there are layers of expertise, just as there are in fields like accounting or law. For example, a technician

trained in ADAS calibration must master advanced diagnostic equipment, precision measurement, and software updates — skills that didn't even exist in the collision industry a decade ago.

Apprenticeships also allow us to adapt quickly. As EV platforms, ADAS systems, and new materials become mainstream, we embed those training requirements directly into TAP. This ensures every graduate leaves not just job-ready, but future-ready — with a credential that reflects the reality of modern vehicles and the confidence to keep pace with innovation in real time.

Government can help accelerate this readiness. Investments in technology-ready apprenticeship programs, incentives for EV and ADAS training, and alignment with emerging industry standards will ensure that America's workforce remains globally competitive and positioned for long-term success.

Addressing the Shortage in Skilled Trades

Apprenticeships are the cornerstone of solving the technician shortage — but they are not the only solution. At Caliber, we are tackling the challenge with a multi-pronged approach that ensures both today's needs and tomorrow's workforce are met.

Silver Tech Mentors: Passing on the Craft

One of the most powerful strategies we use is investing in our Silver Techs — the most experienced technicians in our centers. These men and women are more than employees; they are artisans and true craftsmen, with decades of expertise in body repair, refinishing, welding, and calibration. Their skills are irreplaceable, and we've built TAP around their ability to pass them on.

We recognize that when a Silver Tech takes on an apprentice, their immediate productivity goes down. Teaching takes time, and coaching is not measured in billable hours. That's why Caliber chose to redirect dollars that could have gone into a corporate-heavy training program and invest them directly into our mentors. We compensate and recognize them for the hours they spend teaching, ensuring they don't sacrifice their livelihood to give back to the trade.

The results are powerful. Not only do apprentices receive the highest quality training, but mentors themselves find renewed purpose. One Silver Tech shared with me, *"After 20 years, I thought about moving on. But mentoring gave me purpose again — it reminded me that this is a craft worth passing on."*

Career Pathways and Retention

At Caliber, we know that solving the technician shortage is not only about bringing people into the trade — it's about giving them a future once they arrive. That's why we've built clear and structured career pathways that allow our teammates to grow, advance, and stay in the collision repair industry for the long term.

For many apprentices, TAP is just the beginning. After graduation, they can progress to Master Technician status, where they refine their expertise in complex repairs, structural work, or advanced diagnostics. From there, some move into shop leadership roles — becoming estimators, assistant managers, or general managers who lead teams and serve customers directly. Others transition into specialized technical roles in calibration, glass, or fleet services as vehicles become more complex. And still others follow the path into regional or corporate leadership, shaping not just one shop but the direction of our entire company.

This isn't theory — it's happening every day. We have shop managers, market leaders, and even senior executives who began their careers as technicians. I am one of them. My own journey started in a Caliber center, and step by step I grew into roles with greater responsibility until I became Chief Operating Officer. I've walked the same path I now encourage our apprentices to take — and I know firsthand that these careers are both achievable and rewarding.

What makes these pathways meaningful is that they are visible and attainable. Apprentices see people just a few years ahead of them moving into higher-skill, higher-paying roles, and they know the same opportunities exist for them. That visibility builds retention: people stay when they can see a future.

We reinforce this progression with continuous learning opportunities — advanced training, leadership development, and access to certifications that keep teammates current with evolving technology. Coupled with competitive pay, healthcare, retirement benefits, and recognition programs, these pathways turn collision repair from a job into a sustainable career.

One graduate recently told me, *“When I started TAP, I thought I was just learning how to fix cars. But now I see a path to manage a shop one day. I never imagined I'd be in line to lead people — now I can.”*

Apprenticeships vs. College Outcomes

And the apprenticeship model is proven well beyond the auto body industry. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, about 91% of Registered Apprenticeship completers retain employment after finishing, and in many high-demand industries, average starting wages exceed \$60,000 per year.⁷

By comparison, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), nearly 85% of the Class of 2023 bachelor's degree graduates were employed or pursuing further education within six months of graduation.⁸

This gap is made even starker when you factor in the average student debt burden of more than \$30,000 carried by bachelor's degree recipients. For example, NCES reports that 2015–16 bachelor's degree completers who borrowed federal student loans owed an average of \$45,300 as of 2020.²

Meanwhile, many graduates spend years in entry-level roles with wages below the \$60,000+ starting salaries often achieved immediately by Registered Apprenticeship completers.⁷

Trade schools and community colleges perform an important role, but outcomes are uneven: placement rates vary widely by program and geography, and graduates often lack the kind of structured, paid, on-the-job training that Registered Apprenticeships deliver.

Simply put: apprenticeship is one of the most cost-effective, high-return workforce strategies available — combining higher employment rates, strong starting wages, and zero debt. And Caliber has shown that it works at scale.

Recommendations

Based on our experience, Caliber believes apprenticeships can and should be scaled nationally — and more importantly, they need to be. Since 2023, Caliber has graduated more than 2,300 technicians through TAP.³ That is meaningful progress, but it is only a fraction of the projected need. In the collision repair industry alone, the TechForce Foundation estimates that over 100,000 new technicians will be required between 2024 and 2028.¹

And the challenge extends beyond collision. When you include the broader areas TechForce tracks — automotive, collision, diesel, and aviation — the projected demand from 2024 to 2028 is nearly 800,000 new technicians.¹ Apprenticeships are uniquely positioned to meet this scale: they combine classroom learning with paid, on-the-job experience, producing debt-free graduates who are job-ready from day one.

Caliber has proven that the model works. Our 2,300 graduates since 2023 show what can be achieved — but with the right policy support, it won't just be Caliber growing. Removing barriers would enable the entire industry to scale apprenticeship programs faster, producing tens of thousands more skilled technicians across sectors each year. That is the kind of impact required to meet the workforce crisis head-on.

To meet this national demand, we believe Congress should establish a framework that does three things: removes barriers, ensures sustainable investment, and reaches students early. These principles are simple, bipartisan, and proven to work.

1. Reduce Regulatory Burdens

- **Support Competency-Based Models** – Apprentices should graduate when they are ready, not when the clock runs out. Allowing competency-based programs ensures apprentices move at the pace of their ability, reduces unnecessary costs, and gets fully trained workers into the economy faster. In TAP, this flexibility is why some graduates complete in 12 months while others take 18 — both outcomes are successful, because both are based on mastery.
- **Delegate Supervision/Oversight to Program Sponsors/Employers** – Provide sponsors flexibility to determine the numeric ratio of apprentices to mentors. If a mentor can safely and effectively train more than one apprentice, we can scale programs faster. Sponsors also have a vested interest in ensuring apprentices are trained and able to operate safely. Similarly, allow sponsors to determine the appropriate wage progression that factors in both program length and industry pay considerations, and delegate to sponsors the ability to justify the quantity of required technical instruction provided.

2. Facilitate Sustainable Investment

- **Tax Credits for Registered Apprenticeship Program Sponsors** – Sponsoring an apprentice requires significant employer investment — wages, healthcare benefits, professional-grade tools worth thousands of dollars, and the time of highly skilled mentors whose productivity decreases while they teach. These are not small expenses; they are major commitments that companies like Caliber make because we believe in building the workforce of the future. A federal apprenticeship business tax credit would incentivize employers of all sizes to sustain apprenticeship programs. Just as importantly, tax credits would protect programs during economic or business downturns. Too often, workforce development is the first budget line cut when revenues tighten. By ensuring apprenticeship programs remain financially viable even in challenging times, Congress can help insulate the pipeline of skilled workers from disruption.
- **Reciprocity** – To maintain national cohesion and maximize the impact of federal investments, we recommend requiring any state that receives federal apprenticeship funding to recognize both state-level and nationally registered apprenticeship programs. This ensures that credentials earned in one jurisdiction are portable across others, promoting workforce mobility at a time when shortages are national, not local. Requiring reciprocity would also prevent duplication and reduce administrative burdens, allowing employer-driven programs to operate more efficiently across state lines. Most importantly, it would ensure that federal dollars are supporting apprentices equitably, regardless of geography.

- Invest in Technology-Ready Training – Cars are changing, and apprenticeships must change with them. Grants that support training on electric vehicles, ADAS calibrations, and AI-supported estimating will ensure that apprentices graduate ready for the vehicles on the road today — and tomorrow. This not only strengthens America’s competitiveness, it also supports industries where skilled technicians are a matter of safety and efficiency.

3. Reach Students Early

- Promote High School Exposure – Too many students don’t even know apprenticeship is an option. Expanding Career and Technical Education (CTE) funding so every high school has the tools, instructors, and partnerships needed to connect students to apprenticeships would change lives. For many, awareness alone is the spark that changes their trajectory.
- Support Veterans and Military Families – Apprenticeships are not just for high school graduates. Programs like Caliber’s Changing Lanes provide transitioning service members — and their spouses — a clear path to civilian careers. We encourage Congress to help ensure that veterans are aware they can use their GI Bill benefits while participating in apprenticeship programs and to incentivize more employers to actively recruit veterans into these pathways. By doing so, those who have served our country can continue to build meaningful, prosperous lives when they return home.

A Call to Action

These recommendations are not just about Caliber. They are about scaling apprenticeship models that already exist across collision repair and other skilled trades. The examples I’ve shared today come from our program, but they are representative of the broader industry. With the right policy support, with a federal apprenticeship tax credit as the cornerstone, these models can grow side by side to deliver the workforce America needs.

But policy alone is not enough. Meeting the demand of 100,000 new collision technicians — and nearly 800,000 across automotive, diesel, and aviation — will require more organizations and employers to invest in apprenticeship programs. Caliber has shown what’s possible: since 2023, we’ve graduated more than **2,300 apprentices across 41 states**.³ Yet the scale of the need far exceeds what any one company can do alone.

Taken together, these recommendations create a national framework that empowers individuals, strengthens businesses, and ensures America’s workforce is prepared for the road ahead. This is not about creating something untested — it’s about scaling what works. If employers across industries make the same commitment, and Congress provides the right support, apprenticeships

could produce tens of thousands more skilled workers every year — creating prosperity for families, stability for communities, and competitiveness for our nation.

On behalf of Caliber Collision, I would once again like to thank the Chairman, the Ranking Member, and all the members of the House of Representatives Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs for the opportunity to testify today. I hope my testimony has provided valuable industry insights into the benefits that apprenticeship programs provide to American workers and the economy.

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