

Written Testimony of Representative David Cicilline (RI-01)
Make It in America: What's Next?
PANEL 4: The Future of American Manufacturing & Skills Training

Thank you, Whip Hoyer, for convening this hearing and for the opportunity to discuss the future of the Make it In America plan and workforce development.

Over the years, our manufacturing industry has pushed this nation forward, defining much of our economic history.

And today, manufacturing presents new opportunities as a robust, 21st century enterprise.

My home state of Rhode Island is the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. Rhode Islanders are proud of our history of innovation and investment in the manufacturing sector, which has maintained a strong presence as a permanent part of our state's economic landscape.

Manufacturers employed over 41,000 workers in Rhode Island in 2014 and exported \$1.68 billion in manufactured goods. But we can do more in Congress to ensure that our manufacturing sector continues to grow and thrive in today's economy.

Keeping firm "Buy America" requirements will help keep traditional manufacturing in America. I am proud to have introduced the 21st Century Buy American Act, which closes loopholes that allow federal agencies to waive Buy America requirements, increase the domestic content percentage requirement, and provide resources for U.S. manufacturers of items in short supply to help them compete against foreign manufacturers for U.S. government contracts. This bill will help rebuild our manufacturing industry and create new jobs by providing an increased demand for American-made products by the federal government.

It is also critical that American manufacturers be notified when there are opportunities for procurement contracts with foreign military entities. I was proud that the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act, which Congress passed, included the "Brickle amendment" and I am hopeful it will be included in the final NDAA agreement. The Brickle Amendment requires the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State to document efforts to engage American manufacturers on procurement opportunities to equip Afghan National Security Forces. This language grew out of a discussion I had with a local textile manufacturer in my district who informed me of this obstacle facing his company and other Rhode Island manufacturers. Providing contract opportunities to American manufacturing companies will create good-paying jobs for middle class families and create new opportunities for Rhode Islanders and other manufacturers across the country to succeed.

I am also working with New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand on legislation to codify the Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership (IMCP) program at the Economic Development Administration. This grant program supports regional projects that focus on manufacturing sectors that demonstrate competitive advantages in the marketplace. This public-private program will enhance the way manufacturing communities leverage federal economic development funds to encourage American communities to focus not only on attracting individual investments one at a time, but transforming themselves into globally competitive manufacturing hubs.

It is also critical that we continue to change the attitude towards manufacturing as a career path. Ensuring that students receive strong STEM education in their academic careers will increase the likelihood they consider manufacturing as a career path. New manufacturing initiatives, such as the Maker Movement has changed the narrative about manufacturing from an antiquated industry to a new, technologically advanced enterprise. Reshaping how we talk about manufacturing will ensure that young Americans entering the workforce view manufacturing as a viable career path and an entry way into the middle class.

In keeping with a strong manufacturing sector, we must ensure the employment needs of manufacturers and other private companies align with the training we are providing our workforce. It is critical that there is open dialogue and communication between employers in the private sector and workforce training institutions to understand the needs of these dynamic and evolving industries.

In August of this year, the White House designated Rhode Island to be a part of the President's TechHire initiative, a multisector effort to empower Americans with the skills they need to succeed in today's economy. TechHire cities and states work with employer partners on new ways to recruit and place applicants based on their skills, create more accelerated tech training opportunities, and invest in innovative placement programs to connect trained workers with entrepreneurial opportunities and well-paying jobs. Programs like TechHire are the type of dynamic public and private investment needed to ensure that our workforce stay competitive in the 21st century.

I thank my colleagues for the work they have done to support manufacturing and workforce development and look forward to working to ensure manufacturing maintains a strong presence as a permanent part of our nation's economic landscape.