



**TRADESWOMEN
TASKFORCE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
THURSDAY, JULY 29, 2021**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:
LAURIE R. GLENN
773.704.7246**

lrglenn@thinkincstrategy.com

MEDIA RELEASE
INFRASTRUCTURE BILL AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPAND NUMBER OF WOMEN IN TRADES
U.S. Senator Gillibrand Proposes Amendment to Infrastructure Legislation

CHICAGO -- Yesterday, the Senate voted to consider a bipartisan agreement for a \$550 billion, once-in-a-generation investment in infrastructure, which will be taken up by the Senate for consideration. It is expected that U.S. Senator Gillibrand (D-NY) will propose an amendment to the bill to include effective equity measures designed to increase opportunities for women and people of color in the construction-trades workforce, similar to those included in the recently passed House Infrastructure bill. She is working to identify colleagues on both sides of the aisle to co-sponsor her amendment.

Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT) and the National Taskforce on Tradeswomen's Issues (TWTF), in partnership with nearly [200 tradeswoman organizations](#), trade unions, construction firms, gender and racial justice organizations, workers-rights groups and industry leaders, support the proposed amendment, which will remove barriers to women and other underrepresented groups entering the trades. They are calling on her colleagues to support Senator Gillibrand's amendment, which will increase the overall demand for women and people of color in infrastructure construction job opportunities, remove barriers to entering and remaining in these well-paid jobs and expand the capacity of states to provide supportive services necessary for those workers to succeed.

"The infrastructure bill presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create tens of thousands of highly-skilled, high-paying jobs for populations that have historically been left on the sidelines," says Jane Vellinga, Executive Director of CWIT. "We cannot achieve full economic recovery if women, and women of color -- populations that have been hardest hit by the pandemic -- are not given the opportunity, tools and resources to participate in the job market on all levels."

The infrastructure bill that passed the House on July 1st includes participation and transparency goals for women and people of color on infrastructure projects. These are a good first step -- but the National Taskforce and CWIT would like to see additional language in the final legislation. Senator Gillibrand's proposed amendment will go one step further and will include:

- **Workforce goals for both women and people of color, with public data;**
- **A goal of 15% apprentice utilization;**
- **Requirements for respectful workplaces, including harassment-prevention training; and**
- **Funding for supportive services like recruitment, pre-apprenticeship, and childcare.**

"Women, and especially women of color, have been overlooked when it comes to infrastructure jobs in construction and manufacturing," says Leah Rambo, a 33 year-old sheetmetal worker, Co-Chair of TWTF and Training Director of the SMART Local 28. "These high-wage jobs give women the ability to take care



TRADESWOMEN
TASKFORCE

of ourselves and our families, and we have proven time and again that we have the grit needed to excel in these jobs.”

Significantly, the amended bill would create a dedicated stream of funding for services that support the hiring and retention of under-represented groups **by requiring that one-half of one percent (0.5%) of the overall federal and state dollars allocated to each state be spent on supportive services for women and people of color.** This could amount to an average of \$50MM per state in essential supportive services designed to remove barriers to entry to the trades.

Under existing law, 0.5% of federal highway aid funds are **allowed** to be spent on critical supportive services; however, few states have taken up this option.

Why is This Funding Needed?

Currently, **only 4.0% of construction workers in the country are women.** Underrepresented groups often need supportive services such as childcare, transportation expenses and the purchase of work-related supplies and equipment to support their access to, entry into, and success in apprenticeships and journey-level positions in the skilled trades.

“Without supportive services, women are caught in a Catch-22,” says Vellinga. “They need the work to afford things like childcare or transportation costs, but without adequate childcare or transportation to their jobs, they cannot work.”

Lupe Hinojosa was in this position a few years ago. She had just left an abusive relationship and needed to support her four children. She had no college degree and no real work experience, but knew she wanted a better life. She found Chicago Women in Trades’ free Women in Welding training program. This 12-week course trained her in the fundamentals of welding, but also provided her with additional support services such as resume writing skills and post-graduation job placement assistance. She now works as a welder at Trendler Inc. in Chicago, Illinois.

“Once they have the job,” says Vellinga, “keeping the job becomes the next hurdle. Retention services like mentorship programs and support groups can help to ensure that they are able to stay in their jobs.”

There is strong evidence that funding supportive services works to increase the number of people from under-represented groups in the construction trades. Take the Oregon Highway Construction Workforce Development Program. Since 2010, they have offered supportive services to participants in trade apprentice programs. 86% of women of color in the program cite the supportive services as essential to their being able to take the high-paying construction jobs. 58% of those who received supportive services were able to complete their apprenticeship -- while only 26% of those who did not receive support services completed the program.

There is also evidence that merely encouraging contractors to hire women is insufficient to disrupt the historically entrenched patterns of discrimination in the construction trades. Unless contracts are clearly tied to equitable hiring requirements, no progress will be made.

Chicago Women in Trades works to ensure that all women who want to work with their hands and earn a good living have equal access to information, training, and employment opportunities. Chicago Women In Trades provides free training programs that provide a clear pathway to high-wage careers in the union construction trades and welding/manufacturing industries. To find out more, visit: <https://cwit.org>.



The National Taskforce on Tradeswomen's Issues works to promote public policies and advocacy initiatives at the national, state and local levels to improve, enforce, fund, and promote best practices towards equity for women in apprenticeship, training, workforce development, career and technical education, and construction and other skilled trades employment, as well as respectful worksites for all. For more information, visit: <https://tradeswomentaskforce.org>.

####