



THE RETAIN INNOVATION & MANUFACTURING ACT

Addressing Manufacturing's Aging Workforce Crisis

Issue

To combat the growing problem of America's aging industrial workforce, bipartisan legislation has been introduced in the United States Senate to award grants to small- and medium-sized manufacturers for the purpose of training new workers to replace departing experienced workers. S. 2977, the "Retain Innovation and Manufacturing Excellence (RIME) Act of 2021" is sponsored by Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Senator James Inhofe (R-OK) and has been referred to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Background

U.S. manufacturing is facing a labor crisis in terms of COVID-19-related challenges compounded by an aging workforce. According to the National Association of Manufacturers, 27 percent of the nation's current industrial workforce is over the age of 55. Consequently, the U.S. manufacturing base will need to fill an estimated 3.5 million jobs over the next decade simply to address age-related attrition among its workforce. The domestic textile sector is already experiencing serious problems in this area with thousands of older, dedicated employees retiring each year. Industry executives consistently identify the difficulty in attracting, training and maintaining the next generation of production workers as one of the leading problems confronting U.S. textile manufacturers.

The RIME Act

S. 2977 authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to establish a pilot program to award National Institute of Standards and Technology Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) grants. These grants would help ensure an adequately trained manufacturing workforce. Under the program, MEP grants may be awarded to eligible manufacturers to retain retiring employees for up to 90 days for the purpose of transferring job-specific skills and training to existing or new employees. In awarding grants, special consideration would be given to manufacturers that are experiencing high employee turnover resulting from challenges in transferring required job-specific skills and training to new employees.

The legislation requires a 50 percent, non-Federal match of funds awarded. Those sources may include State and local agencies engaged in workforce development, foundations engaged in workforce development, or an in-kind contribution from an employer that stands to benefit from a MEP grant.

Conclusion

Based on the substantial and growing crisis confronting domestic textile manufacturers in terms of age-related employee attrition, USIFI and NFI strongly endorse S. 2977 and encourage its support among members of Congress that represent our industry.