



*"Our People Perform"*

Testimony of Paul Tse

On behalf of Shapiro & Duncan, Inc.

Committee on Education and the Workforce

United States House of Representatives

May 17, 2016

“Helping Students Succeed by Strengthening the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act”

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Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott and Members of the Education and Workforce Committee:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify in front of you today. Thank you for calling this important hearing on the benefits and need to fund career and technical education programs.

My name is Paul Tse, and I am a proud graduate of a CTE program at Thomas Edison High School of Technology in Silver Spring, Maryland. I come before you today as a staunch advocate for career development opportunities for students in construction and the skilled trades.

My journey from apprentice to project manager began in Hong Kong in 1996. When I was ten years old, my parents moved my family to America in search of a better life for their children. We settled in Montgomery County, Maryland and that is where I still live today.

For the first few years of my life in America, my family bounced between rental properties and staying with relatives, as we did not have the financial means to own a home. Although my parents worked tirelessly to provide for their children, they were not immediately able to claim their piece of the American Dream.

Attending Rockville High School, I struggled as a student – I had attendance problems and lackluster grades. I fell into the wrong crowd and lacked any type of direction. As I started my junior year, I noticed my classmates and friends making plans to go off to college, as I sat and watched from the sidelines. I can still remember the feelings of embarrassment and helplessness as those around me began their climb towards success as I sat at the bottom.

My life took a dramatic turn when a family member, who was a roofer, suggested I look into the skilled trades as a career path. Like many of my peers, I had been relentlessly pushed to attend a four year college, as anything else was seen as settling for failure. With the help of my guidance counselor, I found a local career and technical education program and Edison High School of Technology. Without any construction background I nervously decided to enroll in a HVAC program my senior year. For those of you who do not know, HVAC stands for Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning.

Spending my mornings in a typical classroom and my afternoons at Edison I was introduced into the world of construction and the skilled trades following the industry recognized and credentialed curriculum of the National Center for Construction Education and Research. Thanks to dedicated staff and a new found sense of direction, I graduated the program at the same time as my peers were graduating their typical high schools.

Within a week of graduation I had two job offers from respected local companies to join their teams as an apprentice. Even before my peers packed up their cars and headed out for freshman move in day, I accepted a position with Shapiro and Duncan Mechanical Contractors and got right to work. In the

summer I logged valuable hours as a helper on a small construction project and in the fall I started my official apprenticeship program.

For the next four years, I worked on projects during the day and attended classroom education in the evening at Montgomery College, as part of the Air Conditioning Contractors of America program. In the classroom, I was motivated and learned the basic theories of heating and air conditioning and the more complex math equations and calculations. My on-the-job training transferred what I had learned in the evenings onto real world projects.

At the end of my program I was proud to be named a HVAC journeyman as recognized by the state of Maryland. I'd like to note an important fact about the day I graduated: because I was fortunate enough that my employer paid the costs of my apprenticeship program, I was debt free. Not only was I debt free, but I was paid for my work during my four year apprenticeship program. So I received my post-secondary education at no cost and earned four years' salary during that time. I bet there are many folks in this room, both younger and older, who are still paying off their student loans from undergraduate and graduate school.

I started my ascension into leadership positions during my time in the field. I ran small projects as a field foreman – leading small crews of 2-4 technicians in installation work such as AC replacements at condominiums, schools and small office buildings. After 7 years of working in the field, I moved up the project ladder and secured a position as an assistant project manager. After a year of that, my company deemed me a valuable enough asset and I was promoted to be a project manager.

In the construction world, a project manager manages all aspects of a project, including budget, means and methods of accessing work, scheduling and constructability, or how a building is actually built. As someone who has real-world field experience installing systems and welding pipes, I have a unique vantage point as a project manager. I did not only learn from a book how to light a torch – I actually held it in my hand. Some of my colleagues graduated from four year colleges with degrees in construction management and mechanical engineering and while I'm sure it has benefitted them, my field experience and CTE training gave me a true competitive advantage.

I come before you today humbled and thankful I had the opportunity to attend the CTE program at Edison.

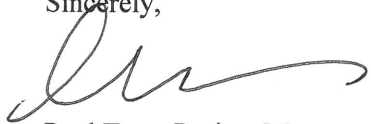
It is time that students, guidance counselors, educators, parents and the American public recognize the fulfilling and lucrative careers that can be achieved in construction and skilled trades. We must all work to remove any stigma that exists that choosing a CTE program over a traditional four year college is somehow “settling.” Those four years I spent at Montgomery College and out in the field, I worked just as hard as students at colleges and universities.

Instead of pushing kids down the “traditional” path of college-prep, we should be pushing kids to explore learning opportunities that prepare them for college and a career. Whether the destination is an engineering degree from the University of Maryland or a journeyman's license from the state of Maryland, high schoolers should have equal opportunities to prepare for either pathway.

Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, Members of the Committee: I am the American Dream. I urge all of you to ensure that every child in America has the same opportunities as I did.

Thank you and I look forward to a great conversation about CTE programs and post-secondary education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Tse', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Paul Tse – Project Manager

Shapiro & Duncan, Inc.