



Invited Testimony on HB 4390

Presented to the Texas Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Economic Development

By Jorge Antonio Borrego

Chairman Birdwell and Members of the Committee:

I am Jorge Borrego, postsecondary analyst for Next Generation Texas at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, and I am testifying in support of HB 4390. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments before this estimable body.

The Foundation recently conducted [research](#) examining the state of career and technical education in Texas public schools. What we found was that there are large gaps between workforce needs and programs of study across multiple sectors but in particular the skilled trades, such as plumbers, electricians, and HVAC technicians. As the booming Texas economy continues to attract businesses and residents from across the country, these gaps will only worsen. It is estimated that by 2030, Texas will be facing a [statewide shortage](#) of over 10,000 electricians, 4,000 HVAC technicians, and over 7,000 plumbers.

In the past, one pathway that brought new blood into the skill trades was apprenticeships. However, in recent years, their completion rates have declined. The most recent data from the U.S. Department of Labor reports that fewer than [2,700 apprenticeships](#) were completed in Texas in 2021. One of the reasons we believe that there is a shortage of completers in apprenticeships is that the current rules surrounding the Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAPs) are too restrictive. Under the current statute, only programs recognized and certified by the U.S. Department of Labor are eligible for the IRAP grant programs, meaning that a portion of our state's apprenticeship dollars are tied to federal rules and definitions. This tying of federal and state program rules has hindered the expansion and innovation in IRAPs by employers in the skilled and emerging industries.

HB 4390 seeks to give the authority to the Texas Workforce Commission to adopt its own rigorous rules in determining which apprenticeships qualify for the IRAP grant program. The Foundation supports HB 4390 as it seeks to give the state the ability to quickly respond to the workforce needs of the state.

We ask that you favorably report HB 4390 out of committee. Thank you for your time, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.