



NEXT GENERATION TEXAS



PUBLIC COMMENTS TO THE TEXAS HOUSE LICENSING AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON HB 1859

BY **Kate Bierly**

OCTOBER 2024

Chairman Ken King and members of the Committee,

My name is Kate Bierly, a postsecondary analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, and I'm here to share an important update regarding HB 1859 and the critical work still needed to bridge the workforce gap in Texas.

First, I want to express my gratitude to the members of the committee for this opportunity to speak on a pressing issue. In the past year, TPPF conducted in-depth research into the state of career and technical education in Texas public schools. Our findings revealed significant disconnects between the demands of our workforce and the programs of study being offered, especially in essential skilled trades like electricians and HVAC technicians.

As you may know, Texas is currently facing a serious shortage in skilled trades, with rural communities being hit the hardest. Many of these technicians are over the age of 45, and as they approach retirement over the next decade, this gap will only widen. By 2030, we anticipate the state will need around 4,000 additional HVAC technicians just to meet demand.

HB 1859 has made a timely impact, particularly given that in 2021, only 50 campuses in Texas had students completing HVAC programs and only 214 people were actively registered apprentices in the HVAC field. This shortage is partially due to the previously high barriers to licensure, which required at least 2,000 hours of on-the-job training—roughly 250 full working days. For many, this was simply unattainable.

Thanks to HB 1859, there's now an alternative pathway for becoming licensed. By completing a career and technology education (CTE) program through a high school or higher education institution, young people—particularly young men, a demographic that has increasingly disengaged from both higher education and work—now have a viable route to a stable, well-paying career in the skilled trades.

We need to continue building on the success of HB 1859 to ensure that Texas is prepared to meet the demands of tomorrow's economy.

Thank you for your time and attention. I'm happy to address any questions you may have.