

March 29, 2022

Representative Rob Ecklund
409 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Ecklund:

I am writing you today in support of HF3953 and SF 4285 that would fund the Building Strong Communities program, an apprenticeship readiness program that introduces you to careers in the construction industry. BSC was instrumental in preparing me for a competitive electrical apprenticeship.

I grew up in north Minneapolis with a single parent, my mother. We did not own a home or a car which meant that many things related to the trades never crossed my path. We didn't have the money, let alone the storage space, for tools. I didn't know about the careers in the trades until I started working at Minneapolis College supporting recruitment and retention in the trades. I came to admire the trades as a way to achieve a sustainable middle-class life and to have a job where you get to move around. It took a few years more for me to find the courage to leave higher education and make the transition to a trade myself. Part of this courage came from the Building Strong Communities program (BSC).

As someone from outside of the trades, I wasn't sure which trade would be a good fit for me. I also wasn't sure about how the different applications processes worked depending on which trade you chose. BSC provided a way to learn about many trades and the support to give me the confidence to go for it. I started the program in March of 2020. Covid definitely challenged all of us, but BSC did a great job of pivoting and still providing invaluable opportunities to learn about the trades. It gave me the time to learn while the construction industry was turned upside down. When it was clear that covid was going to have long term impacts on the construction industry, I decided to apply to the St. Paul College electrical program to keep moving forward.

I am currently in my third semester of the program and will graduate in December of 2022. I have an up-to-date application on file with the local 110 JATC. I am actively looking for a summer pre-apprenticeship opportunity to strengthen my application. I have been checking in with my advocate each semester to let her know how I am doing and ask for her help and support as I move forward. Having people like my advocate connected in the industry is such a confidence booster. I am so grateful for everything the BSC program has provided for me: knowledge, equipment, and support.

Sincerely,

Lara Christley