

Manufacturing Extension Partnership

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Craig Burkhardt
Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology
National Institute of Standards and Technology
100 Bureau Drive
Gaithersburg, MD 20899

Dear Secretary Lutnick and Acting Under Secretary Burkhardt,

We are writing to express support for continued funding of the Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) program. Recently, MEP centers in Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, and Wyoming, were notified by the U.S. Department of Commerce that it would not renew their funding — despite Congress authorizing and appropriating funding for this purpose. Given the Trump Administration’s goals to revive and advance American manufacturing, we believe funding MEP centers remains essential. If we want to build at home, we must equip American manufacturers of all sizes with the tools, funding, and technology to compete and thrive.

The Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership was established by Congress in 1988 in response to a growing concern over the loss of manufacturing jobs and a decline in industrial productivity. A public private partnership, MEPs continue to evolve and to provide U.S. manufacturers with timely and dynamic support. Today there are 51 centers across the United States. This robust network provides small and medium-sized manufacturers with the tools, training, and expertise they need to improve their processes, increase their manufacturing capacity, and bolster their workforce development, cybersecurity, technology adoption, and supply chain management activities.

Since 1988, MEPs have worked with more than 154,000 manufacturers and helped create and retain more than 1.6 million jobs. The network has over 1,440 trusted advisors and experts across 460 MEP Center service locations nationwide. MEPs have also helped create \$148.7 billion in sales and \$31.6 billion in cost savings. Furthermore, the return on investment for American taxpayers is indisputable – for every federal dollar invested in FY 2023, MEP generated more than \$27 in new client investment and nearly \$25 in new sales growth for small and medium-sized manufacturers.

The Administration has talked about bringing manufacturing and supply chains back to the United States. To reach this goal, it is crucial that decision-makers have access to accurate information about supply chain dynamics across the country. Through the Supply Chain Optimization Intelligence Network, authorized by the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act, the

MEP program has collected insightful data and nurtured relationships to help the Commerce Department make strategic decisions affecting the supply chain. The MEP program also uses this information to help small and medium-sized companies respond to supply chain shocks from regional and global events, like severe weather events or fluctuations in trade.

Finally, the Administration cited a refocus on “agency science and technology priorities” as the reason for the funding cuts. It is crucial that MEPs remain funded to ensure this very priority is met. Through MEP, small and medium-sized manufacturers have access to the MEP-Assisted Technology and Technical resource (MATTR) Program. This program provides small and medium-sized manufacturers with access to “laboratory’s core scientific and engineering capabilities, in advanced manufacturing technology, collaborative robotics, additive manufacturing, materials design and characterization, nanotechnology, information and communications technology, quantum information, biosciences, industrial standards, cybersecurity, and other fields.” This effort is proven to move the results of science and technology out of the lab and into use to the benefit of the U.S. economy.

Simply put, to manufacture at home we must support American manufacturers. Denying American workers and small businesses from the resources they need to develop their talents, modernize their operations, and grow their business is counterproductive. At a time when we must harness the power of technology to be effective and competitive producers, we must continue to fund MEPs and provide American businesses with the tools they need. We call on the Administration to reverse course, renew funding for the ten MEP centers that lapsed April 1st, and continue to support the MEP program to advance American manufacturing.

As the Administration continues to evaluate funding for MEPs across the country, we ask that you provide the following information:

- Has the Administration assessed how closing the MEP centers will affect small and medium-sized manufacturers across the 10 states, including those in rural communities? If so, please provide the analysis.
- Is the Administration planning to shutter the entire MEP program? If so, has the Administration assessed how ending the MEP program will affect small and medium-sized manufacturers across the country, including those in rural communities? If so, please provide the analysis.
- In making this decision, has the Administration consulted with the MEP centers, the MEP advisory committee, businesses who use these centers, or other relevant stakeholders? If so, please elaborate.

We request your prompt and detailed response to the questions outlined above no later than April 11, 2025.

Sincerely,