

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 15, 2025

Howard Lutnick
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
14th St and Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick:

We write today to express our strong concerns about the abrupt decision by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to immediately discontinue funding for Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Hollings MEP) centers in Hawaii and several other states. Hollings MEP centers play a critical role in helping states provide support for manufacturers in every state and Puerto Rico. This recent decision will impact small and medium-sized manufacturers in states that were up for renewal on April 1, 2025.

As you well know, Hollings MEP centers have continued to receive bipartisan support as the nation's only network of public-private partnerships that supports small and medium-sized manufacturers in every state and Puerto Rico – with 51 centers nationwide. Through these centers, manufacturers are connected with resources that help them improve and expand the U.S. manufacturing base – promoting competitiveness abroad. Discontinuing funding for these centers threatens to undo years of investments in manufacturers that would undermine the President's stated goal of strengthening manufacturing in the United States.

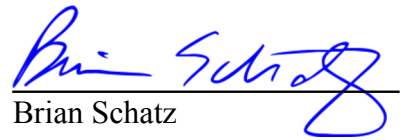
These centers are effective. Despite only receiving \$175 million in Fiscal Year 2024, MEP supported an estimated \$15 billion in new and retained sales, \$5 billion in new client investments, and 108,000 in jobs created or retained. In Hawaii, INNOVATE Hawaii has been able to help more than 1,000 businesses retain over 3,000 jobs through its center, making sure small and medium-sized manufacturers have the necessary support to grow and expand their businesses, while promoting innovation in manufacturing technology and business practices – which is the fundamental purpose of MEP. Future investments in this center and others like it are incredibly critical to supporting the continued growth of the manufacturing sector and will provide returns for American taxpayers.

On Tuesday, April 1, 2025, our offices were notified that NIST would not renew its MEP cooperative agreement with INNOVATE Hawaii, even as the agency was discussing renewal plans with the center earlier that day. We later learned that NIST had sent similar notices to several centers in other states. The stated reason for the decision to discontinue the cooperative agreement was that the award no longer effectuated program goals or agency priorities with respect to new technologies. But given its proven track record of success, the track record of success of other centers throughout the country, and the overall effectiveness of the program, we strongly urge you to reconsider this decision not to renew the cooperative agreements for INNOVATE Hawaii and the other centers that were affected.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Ed Case
Member of Congress



Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress

CC: Craig Burkhardt, Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology and Acting NIST Director, U.S. Department of Commerce