

Dear Governor Kemp,

Thank you for giving the Georgia Association of Manufacturers (GAM) the opportunity to participate in this year's CEO Roundtable Discussion. As a member of GAM's board and the Vice President of Manufacturing for Engineered Floors, I was honored to serve as our industry's unified voice for workforce challenges.

In 2023, Georgia's manufacturing sector experienced a 56% turnover rate, meaning the industry couldn't retain 238,421 of its 424,205 jobs. The leading cause: Manufacturers have to "rob Peter to pay Paul" to fill jobs. Because Georgia no longer has "available" skilled workers, manufacturers must compete with fellow manufacturers to fill—and attempt to retain—positions. This is obviously not sustainable and is why GAM is involved in workforce development.

Georgia has made significant strides in supporting workforce initiatives, like funding career pathways and providing tuition assistance in high-demand fields. These efforts are commendable and must continue, but they primarily address future needs. Manufacturers need solutions that address their immediate challenges. This is where I believe Georgia can strengthen its support. Let me offer GAM's workforce strategy as an example.

Last year, GAM administered a workforce needs assessment to better understand manufacturers' requirements. Many respondents shared an urgent need for technician positions that need to be filled within three to five months. In response, GAM partnered with the Technical College System of Georgia to create fast-track training solutions to fill these immediate needs. These customized, noncredit solutions were designed to equip individuals with no manufacturing experience with up to level two technician skills in three to five months—a significant reduction from the years it would take in traditional academic credit settings. Unfortunately, however, noncredit programs are ineligible for most financial aid options, such as Georgia's HOPE or federal Pell Grants.

Recognizing this, GAM committed to sponsoring four fast-tracking cohorts in select regions across the state, covering 70% of the associated training costs. As a result, beginning in May, we trained 38 associates employed across six of our participating members, helping offset approximately 46 open manufacturing positions within three to five months. Furthermore, GAM's investment made the training more accessible to smaller and medium-sized manufacturers, who otherwise would not have been able to participate had the Association not been involved.

Existing manufacturers in Georgia face an urgent need to fill positions promptly, and waiting one to two years for graduates from relevant credit programs isn't feasible. Moreover, we must evaluate the impact of funding customized workforce training for new jobs, like QuickStart, when retention rates for existing jobs are a concern. We need to ask ourselves, "How effectively are we supporting our existing businesses with job retention?" The driving force behind GAM's workforce strategy is to not only highlight these challenges but also present viable solutions and assist in their implementation. GAM stands ready to assist your administration in addressing these immediate workforce challenges.

Sincerely,

Josh Hall
Board Member, GAM
Vice President of Manufacturing, Engineered Floors