

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 17, 2025

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

Secretary Lutnick,

We write to express concern regarding the Department of Commerce's recent decision to pause federal funding for Ohio's Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) centers and to request additional information on the Department's decision-making process.

We understand the Department of Commerce issued Ohio's MEP program with an initial funding notice that was later suspended pending the outcome of a years-long audit. The pause occurred before the state or the MEP centers received the audit's findings and had an opportunity to review or respond to any identified issues. Following the Commerce Department's action, the Ohio Department of Development froze its state cost-share, effectively placing all state centers into financial crisis.

While we share a commitment to addressing any incidences of fraud and appreciate the ongoing work of the Office of Inspector General, we are concerned that the sudden nature of the funding suspension without any transparency or guidance could have widespread and long-term impacts on the Ohio manufacturing sector.

Ohio's MEP centers, including MAGNET, TechSolve, CIFT, FastLane, PolymerOhio, and OSU's Center for Design and Manufacturing Excellence, are a critical resource for the state's more than 14,000 manufacturers, most of which are small and medium-sized firms that rely on MEP services to stay competitive. MEP centers across Ohio play an important role in supporting manufacturers, driving innovation and technological advancement, and strengthening economic development through the creation of high-quality jobs. Furthermore, these centers produce a high return on Federal investment, with every \$1 of federal invested in MEP generating approximately \$24 in economic activity.¹

Ohio is the nation's third-largest manufacturing state by employment, with a diverse industrial base that includes aerospace, automotive, steel, polymers, and defense manufacturing. Prolonged disruption in MEP funding would stall technical assistance efforts, workforce programs, and modernization projects already underway at hundreds of Ohio firms — delaying supply-chain upgrades and jeopardizing statewide economic growth.

Given the urgency of the situation and statewide impact, we request:

1. A detailed explanation of the factors that informed the decision to suspend funding, including any assessment on how the suspension of funds will affect small and medium-sized manufacturers across the State.
2. An update on the current status of the years-long audit, the preliminary findings, and an anticipated timeline for completion.
3. Whether, and to what extent, the Department consulted with Ohio's MEP centers, the MEP advisory committee, businesses who use these centers, or other relevant stakeholders prior to suspending funds, and how the Department intends to ensure a fair and transparent process that allows affected centers to respond to any findings.

¹ <https://www.nist.gov/news-events/news/2024/04/mep-economic-impacts-boost-business-and-jobs>

4. How the Department is currently holding or intends to use the impounded funds, and whether interim or bridge funding options are being considered to prevent layoffs and service disruptions while the review continues.

At a time when U.S. manufacturing is facing market access loss, foreign competition, and rising input costs, it is more important now than ever that we support domestic supply chains. Ohio's manufacturers rely on MEP centers for the support they need to grow, innovate, and stay competitive.

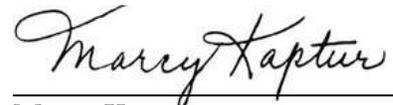
We urge the Department to provide prompt answers to these questions and to consider interim measures that protect Ohio's manufacturers and workers while the audit process is completed. Prolonged uncertainty risks jeopardizing local manufacturers, slowing statewide economic growth, and diminishing our competitiveness in an increasingly challenging global market.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to a detailed response to the questions outlined above.

Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Joyce Beatty
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Greg Landsman
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Emilia Strong Sykes
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