

Per Scholas

Senate Majority Policy Committee
Veterans Workforce Initiatives

[Todd Derby, Regional Senior Vice President, Northeast]

Good afternoon, Chairman Argall, Senator Robinson, and distinguished members of the Senate Majority Policy Committee. My name is Todd Derby, and I serve as Regional Senior Vice President for the Northeast at Per Scholas. On behalf of our entire organization, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the critical issue of advancing workforce development initiatives designed to support and empower our veterans.

Founded in the South Bronx in 1995, Per Scholas is a national organization that has launched the careers of more than 30,000 technology professionals to date through our no-cost technical training. We work directly with employers, large and small, to design rigorous, boot camp-style courses to meet their hiring needs. Our tuition-free training combines business professional skills development with hands-on technical instruction for high demand jobs. We know that in 2025, all jobs are tech jobs, and tech jobs are everywhere.

Per Scholas' mission is to advance economic mobility through rigorous training for tech careers and to connect skilled talent to leading businesses. We believe a thriving workforce begins with providing meaningful educational and training opportunities that are accessible to everyone, especially veterans.

Through tuition-free technical training in fields such as IT Support, Cybersecurity, Software Engineering – as well as wrap-around supports, professional coaching, career connections, and alumni upskilling - we strive to promote upward mobility for Pennsylvania residents and military veterans, and we power economic development by building a skilled and thriving tech workforce.

We believe technology is a key element of the region's economic future and that our experience and success at building pipelines of skilled tech talent has and will continue to benefit the people and businesses here. We also know it is a lack of access to education and employer connections—not a lack of talent—that prevents people from entering the tech sector.

All Per Scholas learners receive 400+ hours of technical instruction, 100+ hours of durable business and professional skills, and holistic support (including a social worker and financial coach) from the moment they join the program and for two additional years upon completion. All of this is offered, always, at no cost to our learners.

We have strategically scaled our program, and today Per Scholas has campuses in 24 cities throughout the country, including the Pittsburgh campus which launched in 2021. In Pittsburgh, we have trained over 500 adult learners, and these graduates are now thriving in tech jobs at businesses such as PNC Bank, Comcast, Giant Eagle, University of Pittsburgh, BNY, and more.

61% of our learners in Pittsburgh had a high school degree/equivalency, associate degree, or trade school as their highest pre-training education – and yet upon completion of our 13 week program, these graduates earned an average wage starting wage of \$22.81 at their first tech job at some of the area's top employers.

To make training accessible to more people, Per Scholas recently launched two initiatives: the first: Zero Percent Learner Living Loans. IT Support learners will have the opportunity to apply for a \$3000, 0% interest, while enrolled in our training to support any costs incurred while enrolled in our training - essentials such as rent, gas, food, utilities, childcare. This loan is not to be paid back until a graduate is earning \$40,000+, and the remaining balance is forgiven after two years.

My colleague, George Darby, will share more about our second initiative: our Veterans in Tech Program, and all that Per Scholas is doing to create opportunities for veterans.

[George Darby III, Director of Veteran Recruitment and Partnerships]

It's truly an honor to stand before you today as a veteran who served in the United States Air Force for over 20 years. Throughout my military career, I had the privilege of working alongside some of the most dedicated and talented individuals I've ever met. But like many of my fellow service members, when the time came to transition out of the military, I faced the daunting question: What's next?

That transition is often one of the biggest challenges we face as veterans. We leave behind a structured environment where we have a clear mission and a strong sense of purpose. Many of us wonder how our military experience translates into the civilian workforce, particularly in industries that are rapidly evolving, like technology. That's where organizations, including Per Scholas, come in.

As Todd mentioned, Per Scholas has had no-cost tech training since 1995, and their commitment to empowering individuals is truly remarkable. Our **Vets in Tech** initiative is specifically designed for veterans and military spouses, offering world-class training that leads directly to high-growth careers in the tech industry.

Through **hands-on training** in fields like IT Support, Cybersecurity, Software Engineering, and AWS Cloud Computing, veterans are given the tools they need to succeed. And it's not just about technical skills—20% of the curriculum is dedicated to professional development, including resume building, interview preparation, and effective communication. These are the skills that truly make a difference when stepping into the civilian job market.

Beyond training, Per Scholas ensures that every veteran receives **personalized support** through career coaches and a dedicated Learner Support Team. They help with everything from financial planning to job search strategies, making sure that no veteran or their spouse has to navigate this journey alone. And thanks to their partnerships with over **850 employer**

organizations, technologists are connected directly to companies actively seeking skilled professionals. And part of my role is to ensure that the employers we work with are not just military-friendly, but military-ready.

One of the most exciting aspects of Per Scholas's Vets in Tech initiative is its partnership with the **Department of Defense SkillBridge Program**. This means that service members can begin training **during their final 180 days of service** while still receiving military pay and benefits. It's a game-changer for those looking to make a seamless transition into civilian careers.

Per Scholas has set a bold goal: **enroll 1,000 veterans and military spouses in the next three years**, generating over **\$29 million in annual wages for military families**. This isn't just about job training—it's about financial stability, career growth, and ensuring that veterans and their families have access to opportunities that match their dedication and skill.

To our community and employer partners, I urge you to support initiatives like this one. Hiring veterans isn't just the right thing to do—it's a smart business decision. Veterans bring discipline, teamwork, and mission-focused thinking to any organization, and programs like Per Scholas Vets in Tech ensure they have the training to thrive in today's workforce.

In closing, I want to thank Per Scholas for its unwavering commitment to veterans and their families. And I want to thank all of you for your time, your support, and your dedication to empowering those who have served. **Together, we can build a future where veterans not only transition successfully but thrive in careers that recognize their true potential.**

I am now honored to present Aaron Webb, another fellow Veteran to speak with you. Thank you.

[Aaron Webb, Veteran and Per Scholas Graduate]

Aaron will share the story of his journey from service, to Per Scholas, to working in the IT field.