

# Federal Roadblocks Slow MRO Workforce Development

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Students at aviation maintenance schools face significant delays in testing for their FAA Airframe and Powerplant licenses due to a shortage of designated maintenance examiners and testing centers.

Credit: Aviation Institute of Maintenance

NORFOLK, Virginia—At the Aviation Technician Education Council’s Annual Conference this week, its leaders shared priorities the group intends to push on Capitol Hill this year to boost the educational development and pipeline of future maintenance technicians.

Several of the priorities build on goals the Aviation Technician Education Council (ATEC) accomplished through its work with congressional allies on last year’s FAA Reauthorization Act, such as boosting funding for the agency’s workforce development grants and taking steps toward simplifying military veterans’ transitions to civil aviation careers.

## Funding MRO Training Initiatives

The Reauthorization Act redesignated workforce grant funding as the Cooperative Aviation Recruitment, Enrichment and Employment Readiness (CAREER) Program, which authorizes \$20 million in funding for aviation maintenance, aircraft pilot and aviation manufacturing development programs through 2028. The changes include increasing the maximum award amount limit for grant recipients through all three programs to \$1 million, up from \$500,000.

According to Jared Britt, ATEC vice president and legislative committee chair, the council worked hard to achieve these changes, but “we have to make sure that money gets appropriated now.”

However, the Trump administration’s anti-DEI executive orders could cause challenges for some schools and organizations that previously applied for these grants—particularly if they intended for the funding to go toward programs with a diversity, equity and inclusion focus. ATEC told attendees that applicants are now being asked to reapply under a shorter 15-day period—down from the previous 30 days—with the implication that applicants must remove any DEI language.

“The problem is that a lot of schools haven’t changed their policies yet, so they’re a little slow on that,” Britt says. “They’re going to have to wrestle with how to do their documentation or grant writing.” For instance, the Association for Women in Aviation Maintenance told Aviation

Week Network that the state of Texas has made it illegal for the organization—which is technically branded as a DEI group—to provide scholarship funds to anybody in the Texas public school system.

## Simplifying Military Transitions

Another priority ATEC has invested significant efforts in is helping military veterans with aviation maintenance experience transition to the civil aviation sector. These veterans often face [confusing bureaucracy and redundant requirements](#) when attempting to obtain the FAA Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) licenses necessary to get civil MRO jobs. Last year's FAA Reauthorization Act requires the FAA to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking to revise Part 65 certification requirements to create a military mechanic written competency test and, if necessary, to develop a relevant Airman Certification Standard (ACS) to qualify eligible military maintenance technicians for a civilian mechanic certificate with A&P ratings.

“It took us six years to get here,” Britt says. “We’re going to keep pushing this one until we get to a point where these [military veterans] don’t have to figure it out on their own and go sit through an airframe course for a year after they just spent the last 25 years working on F-16s.”

## Reducing Barriers To Testing

Beyond removing barriers to A&P licenses for military veterans, ATEC also wants to provide easier pathways for students at Part 147 schools and high school aviation maintenance programs, such as those utilizing the [Choose Aerospace curriculum](#).

ATEC successfully got a requirement in the 2024 Reauthorization for the FAA to establish an ACS working group to assess whether to allow high school students who have successfully completed aviation maintenance curriculum to take the general portion of the mechanic examination. “We put [the ACS working group] in the legislation last year to force [the FAA] to meet with industry consistently, so we want to hold their feet to the fire and make sure that stays active so we can all have a voice in what the ACS is doing for us and what it’s saying,” Britt says.

However, he acknowledged that the group’s progress may be impacted by Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) cuts to the FAA, particularly since some of the staff working on the committee have left the agency. “I think it’s going to slow things down a little bit for the short term,” he says. ATEC told attendees the FAA has stopped talking and meeting with the ACS working group over the last two months.

Another A&P testing roadblock is the shortage of designated maintenance examiners (DME), who administer the written portion of the tests at approved testing centers. At last year’s ATEC Conference, sources told *Inside MRO* that Part 147 students were being forced to wait for months and to travel to neighboring states to take these tests due to the shortage.

ATEC is urging the FAA to increase access to testing centers and expand the Organization Designation Authorization program to include examiner delegations so that schools or businesses could conduct the tests themselves. It is also calling for greater flexibility so DMEs can conduct the tests at any Part 147 program nationwide.

Britt says DMEs currently must get FAA approval to add a new testing location to their Certificate and Letter of Authority (CLOA), including jumping through hoops such as ensuring they have a school to host testing at these locations. “As far as I know, there are only about three DMEs in the entire country that successfully do that,” Britt says.

“The big issue is [the FAA] is allowing the Flight Standards Districts Offices (FSDO) to make the decision. They can choose not to allow a [new] DME [at a specific location] because they don’t think there’s enough testing, or they don’t have to allow a DME because they don’t have enough people to manage another designee,” he says. If a FSDO denies a new DME at a location, Britt argues that they are unlikely to let another DME add that location to their CLOA. “We’re trying to talk to the FAA and explain the situation, but I don’t think they’re really getting the internal workings of what the problem is.”

ATEC members also lamented one private company’s apparent monopoly on opening and operating these testing centers. PSI Services has a 10-year exclusive Airman Certificate Testing Service contract with the FAA, awarded in 2018, to provide test development, delivery and analysis. Several Part 147 schools at the ATEC Conference told Aviation Week they have had consistent problems with PSI in trying to get new testing centers set up. One director of training said his school has been trying for three years to establish a testing center, but PSI keeps saying no, while the president at another school joked, “We all have a little PSI PTSD.”

## STEM Designation

Despite the MRO industry’s clear technical and engineering focus, ATEC reports that aviation maintenance programs are not considered a “STEM field of study” under certain federal agency classification systems, such as those of the Department of Labor and Department of Homeland Security. The council believes this omission causes several disadvantages for Part 147 programs and students.

Britt notes that being classified as a STEM program provides access to a lot of additional funding in some states that Part 147 schools currently cannot apply for. The STEM designation could also help international students gain access to better job opportunities. For instance, international students could work for three years upon graduation under an Optional Practical Training (OPT) visa instead of only one year. He says this matters because scholarships from airlines typically come with a three-year work commitment, which disqualifies one-year OPT students from accessing those scholarships or being able to work for those airlines.

