Officials from the N.C. Department of Labor (NCDOL) and the N.C. Home Builders Educational and Charitable Foundation (Foundation) gathered for a contract signing event to officially mark the establishment of the Be Pro Be Proud pilot program. The program will be administered by the Foundation with oversight from NCDOL. The goal of the Be Pro Be Proud program is to stimulate student, parent and educator interest in technical professions within the construction, manufacturing, transportation and utility industries. The program utilizes a custom-built mobile workshop trailer offering hands-on experience with skilled professionals to middle and high school students statewide.

"When I was asked if Be Pro Be Proud could be housed under the N.C. Department of Labor and saw what a program like this could do for our state's workforce, I said yes," Labor Commissioner Josh Dobson said. "In my capacity as Labor Commissioner, I want to help in any way that I can. This project will help build opportunities for the future of North Carolina's workforce and I believe that future is bright."

Interested students will be offered opportunities to pursue specific interest through hands-on learning, volunteering, and participating in networking events with potential job and postsecondary school recruiters. Be Pro Be Proud will also work with the N.C. Trucking Association to support a workforce development program to increase operators and fill a crucial skills gap across the state.

"Labor is the number one issue for our industry right now, and Be Pro Be Proud is one meaningful way for us to move the needle in the right direction," Tim Minton, N.C. Home Builders Association Executive Vice President said. "We are excited to play an active role in this partnership, as we know this program will put North Carolina ahead of the curve in terms of addressing the needs of the workforce."

Funds for the North Carolina program were included in the 2021 Appropriations Act (Session Law 2021-180). Governor Cooper signed the bill into law in November 2021. Additional partners in the program may include the N.C. Community Colleges System Office, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, the N.C. Department of Commerce, the myFutureNC Commission, and other industry associations and job recruiters.

"It has been a great opportunity to work with the N.C. Department of Labor and Labor Commissioner Josh Dobson on this project," Representative Jason Saine said. "Labor Commissioner Josh Dobson is an innovator, and I knew this project should go to the labor

department. Be Pro Be Proud will prepare our state's workforce for the future."

Be Pro Be Proud is a workforce development initiative changing the perceptions around technical careers through a mobile workshop tour that features virtual reality simulations that allow students to step into a life of a technical professional. Be Pro Be Proud began in 2016 as an initiative of the Arkansas State Chamber / Associated Industries of Arkansas and has since completed 994 tour stops across 561 cities in Arkansas, Georgia and South Carolina. The effort to bring Be Bro Be Proud to North Carolina will increase visibility of technical careers and training in the state.

"I appreciate the opportunity to be here representing Be Pro Be Proud in my home state," Hunter Blohm, Deputy General Counsel and Director of Federal Programs, Be Pro Be Proud, said. "I am excited for the impact Be Pro Be Proud is going to have changing perceptions of skilled professions in North Carolina."