

Ryan Petty, *Chair*
MaryLynn Magar, *Vice Chair*
Members
Grazie P. Christie
Layla Collins
Daniel P. Foganholi, Sr.
Erika Fritz-Ochs
Luis Fuste

September 8, 2026

The Honorable Jared Isaacman
Administrator
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
300 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Administrator Isaacman,

Florida should be the permanent home of the United States Space Academy.

The Presidential Commission you chair is charged with recommending how America will educate the next generation of astronauts, scientists, engineers, operators, entrepreneurs, civil servants and warfighters. That mission requires more than a campus. It requires a place where cadets can study, train, and serve beside the people and systems that already launch, build, and defend the nation's presence in space. No other state offers that combination at Florida's scale.

Florida is where America launches. Just as importantly, Florida is where America is already building the people who make those launches possible.

The Space Coast is home to Kennedy Space Center, Cape Canaveral Space Force Station and Patrick Space Force Base. For more than 60 years, this region has been central to American spaceflight. Today, it is one of the few places in the country where students can learn beside active launch operations, federal space assets, commercial aerospace companies and a highly specialized workforce. Kennedy Space Center alone supports roughly 17,700 civil servants and contractors. The broader Space Coast employs more than 30,000 aerospace workers. Statewide, aerospace and aviation support nearly 149,000 jobs, more than 3,000 establishments, and \$34.1 billion in economic activity, with average wages above \$100,000.

The industrial base is still expanding. Blue Origin now employs nearly 4,000 people in Florida and is investing \$600 million to add 500 high-wage jobs at Cape Canaveral. SpaceX's Starship work at Kennedy Space Center represents a minimum \$1.8 billion investment. Relativity Space has committed to a major expansion expected to create thousands of high-skill jobs this decade. L3Harris is headquartered in Melbourne. ULA, Northrop Grumman, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and a deep supplier network operate here. Cadets at Florida academy would train inside the industry the Academy exists to serve.

But Florida's case is larger than geography. Florida has built a statewide education and workforce system capable of supplying the talent pipeline the United States Space Academy will require from day one. More than 818,000 K-12 students and 512,000 postsecondary students are enrolled in career and technical education (CTE) programs—a 30 percent increase since 2018-19. Of those, approximately 200,000 students are enrolled in programs directly aligned to the space economy, including aerospace and aviation, advanced manufacturing, engineering, robotics, electronics, cybersecurity and information technology, logistics, construction, semiconductors and related technical fields.

Through the Space Florida Academy Program, for example, the state has already organized a workforce pipeline around six areas industry has identified as critical to aerospace growth: aviation and aerospace, advanced manufacturing, construction, cybersecurity and information technology, logistics and semiconductors.

More than 40 school districts are now participating, from the Space Coast to the Panhandle and South Florida. Florida is not proposing to invite a pipeline after the Academy arrives. The pipeline is already here. The future of American space leadership will depend on engineers and scientists, but also on technicians, machinists, welders, electricians, cybersecurity specialists, logistics professionals, advanced manufacturing workers, construction trades and skilled operators. Florida is already training all of them.

Sustained public investment stands behind that work. Thanks to Governor DeSantis and the Florida Legislature, since 2019, Florida has committed more than 12 billion to workforce education and training. The Fiscal Year 2026-27 budget continues that commitment with more than \$730 million for workforce education, including approximately \$470 million for postsecondary workforce education, \$40 million for the capital improvements for CTE programs, \$20 million Registered Apprenticeships, and \$25 million a “last dollar” grant for CTE programs, along with additional state investments in high-demand workforce programs, industry certifications and technical education.

Recent CTE wins continue to add capacity where the space economy needs it most. In July 2026, Florida was awarded \$40 million by the U.S. Department of Labor to expand Registered Apprenticeships in occupations critical for national security. Florida's own Registered Apprenticeship investments total more than \$105 million since 2019, funding more than 350 proposals and serving more than 20,000 participants in high-demand occupations, including manufacturing, mechatronics, composites, machining and cybersecurity. In August 2026, the U.S. Department of Labor and Education grant announced a \$6 million grant to Florida to grow high-demand technical pathways, are adding seats in programs that feed the same talent pipeline.

Florida's apprenticeship system is now a national-scale asset. In 2024-25, more than 25,000 apprentices and pre-apprentices participated in registered programs, supported by more than 2,100 employers. Completers earned an average exit wage of nearly \$28 an hour. Since 2019, registered apprentices are up 70 percent, registered apprenticeship programs are up 49 percent, and pre-apprenticeship programs are up 112 percent.

A student can begin exploring aerospace in middle or high school, earn an industry-recognized credential, continue into a district technical college or Florida College System institution, enter apprenticeship or work-based learning, advance into university such as Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, the University of Central Florida, Florida Institute of Technology and/or the University of Florida, and move into employment or service alongside NASA, the United States Space Force and commercial industry. Few places in America can offer that continuity at this scale.

Adult education expands the pipeline further. More than 200,000 adult learners participate in programs that help Floridians strengthen foundational skills, transition into technical education and enter high-demand careers. Florida has reimagined its Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act to allow adults with no high school diploma, or some college but no degree, to concurrently or simultaneously enroll in their adult education coursework and an in-demand CTE program. Florida has Florida does not rely on a single route into the workforce; it creates multiple entry points so more Americans can acquire the skills the space economy needs.

The strength of Florida's model is the way these pieces connect. Schools introduce students to high-demand careers. Florida's 48 technical or trade colleges and 28 state or community colleges provide advanced skills training, rapid certification, or a pathway to a high-quality degree. Our universities develop engineers, scientists and researchers, leading the nation on affordability, employment, and patent development. Registered Apprenticeship connects learning directly to employers. Adult education brings additional talent into the pipeline. State workforce policy and investment help programs respond to industry demand.

All of this exists in the same state that is already home to one of the most consequential space ecosystems in the world. On the Space Coast itself, that system already operates next to the launch pads. Brevard and Volusia County Public Schools offer aerospace pathways including astronautics and flight exploration, space mechatronics, applied engineering, robotics, cybersecurity and advanced manufacturing. Eastern Florida State College, Daytona State College, Valencia College, and Florida Tech and regional employers run certified production technician training, accelerated dual enrollment and Registered Apprenticeships tied directly to local aerospace and manufacturing demand.

Valencia College, for example, is now offering precision optics, semiconductors, and other advanced composite training critical for the future of the space industry. As part of Florida's higher education system, our 28 state colleges offer high-quality, in-demand programs to our residents, military service members and families, and the future employees of the space industry. They stand ready to partner, share resources, and faculty, and drive the kind of innovation this country demands, —and our President expects. As you may know, Florida is proud to boast of its higher education ranking—number one in the nation now 10 years in a row.

That proximity and willingness to partner gives the United States Space Academy the opportunity to operate inside an active talent ecosystem rather than adjacent to one. Cadets would learn where American spaceflight is happening. Students across Florida would gain direct exposure to the Academy and the careers it represents. Employers would gain a stronger connection to the next

United States Space Academy - Florida
September 8, 2026
Page Four

generation of talent. The Commission would place the Academy where experiential training—the model of the Executive Order asks you to design—can begin *immediately*.

Florida is not asking to host the Space Academy because of history alone. The stronger case is that the future the Academy is intended to build is already taking shape here.

If the mission is to strengthen American leadership in space, prepare the next generation of technical and professional talent, and connect education to national service and industry, the Academy belongs in Florida.

I respectfully urge the Commission to recommend Florida's Space Coast as the permanent home of the United States Space Academy. The Florida Department of Education stands ready to provide additional student enrollment, program, workforce and investment data, and to support the development of education, apprenticeship and industry partnerships that would allow the Academy to succeed from day one.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Henry Mack", followed by a period.

Henry Mack, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Education

cc: Ron DeSantis, Governor
Rob Long, President and CEO, Space Florida
Ashley Moody, Senator
Rick Scott, Senator
Ray Rodrigues, Chancellor, State University System
Honorable Members of the Florida House and Senate