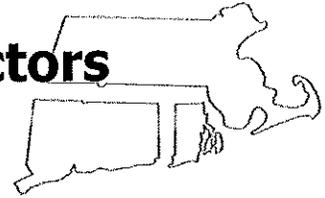




Independent Electrical Contractors of New England, Inc.



Testimony
Lisa Hutner
Independent Electrical Contractors of New England
Before the Education Committee
March 9, 2009

Re: HB-6370, An Act Concerning the Middle College System

The Independent Electrical Contractors of New England (IEC-NE) *opposes* provisions in HB-6370, which would transfer oversight of apprenticeship training from the state Department of Labor to a newly created Middle College System.

While we understand this measure was initiated to reduce state spending, it is unclear how transferring the apprenticeship training program, which has operated efficiently and effectively under the state Department of Labor, could possibly save state resources.

It is our understanding that the state is required by federal law to provide apprenticeship training services. Recognizing this, when the apprenticeship training budget was significantly cut in 2002, members of various groups representing the skilled trades worked closely with the state Department of Labor (DOL) to continue to provide employers and individuals with "core apprenticeship services", including the registration of apprentices. Because the lack of staff at DOL resulted in lengthy delays in registering apprentices, we all worked together – unions and non-unions – to develop a mechanism for assisting the state in funding the program through a registration fee on the sponsor and the apprentice.

Our members have a good working relationship with the apprenticeship training staff at DOL and are concerned that transferring oversight of this important function will once again result in delays in registering apprentices – delays which are very likely to occur during our peak season.

Apprenticeship training provides vital employment and training opportunities for Connecticut's young people. In Connecticut, more than 1,700 employers employ over 5,500 apprentices in registered apprenticeship programs. These programs serve a diverse population, including minorities, women, youths, dislocated workers and veterans. Disrupting the current program could very likely undermine the state's apprenticeship training efforts and result in the loss of vital employment and training opportunities for Connecticut's young people. We therefore urge you to oppose this provision.

Relative to the overall proposal to combine the Technical High School and the Community Colleges to create a "Middle College" system, we urge lawmakers to carefully determine whether this merger would undermine the state's efforts to develop a pipeline of employees in the skilled trades, which is – and should continue to be – the core mission of the state's Technical High Schools. We would oppose any initiatives that weakened the state's ability to attract and train students to pursue careers in the skilled trades.

The Independent Electrical Contractors of New England is the premier trade association representing Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island independent electrical contractors aggressively working with the industry to establish a free environment for merit shop -- a philosophy that promotes the concept of free enterprise, open competition and economic opportunity for all.

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