



HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION OF CONNECTICUT, INC.
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*Your Home
Is Our
Business*

February 16, 2010

To: Senator Tom Colapietro and Representative Jim Shapiro, Co-Chairs, and members of the General Law Committee

From: Bill Ethier, CAE, Chief Executive Officer

Re: RB 133 AAC Apprentice to Journeymen Contractor Ratios

The HBA of Connecticut is a professional trade association with 1,100 member firms statewide, employing tens of thousands of Connecticut citizens. Our members are residential and commercial builders, land developers, home improvement contractors, trade contractors, suppliers and those businesses and professionals that provide services to our diverse industry. We estimate that our members build 70% to 80% of all new homes and apartments in the state.

We support the intent, as it has been described to us, but not the language of RB 133, as a step in the right direction to fix CT's nonsensical trade hiring limitation. And, we firmly believe that even the intent does not go far enough to help grow the workforce in the licensed trades.

The limitation of the statutory 3:1 hiring ratio (i.e., after the first journeyman and first apprentice hired, you have to hire 3 journeymen to hire the next apprentice) increases project costs by forcing the nonunion contractor to hire extra journeymen before hiring an apprentice, contributes to manpower shortages, and denies younger persons additional opportunities to learn the trades. We understand the intent of the RB 133 is to change the hiring ratio for plumbing, heating, piping, cooling, sprinkler fitter and sheet metal to the current law applicable to electrical and other trades. **The language of the bill does not do this. Moreover, we do not agree to this "compromise" reached between other organizations.** We continue to urge that you change the hiring ratio to 1:1 primarily because public safety would be maintained since the current work site 1:1 ratio would not be affected.

A policy that requires anything more than a 1:1 hiring ratio of journeyman to apprentice severely limits the ability of nonunion trade businesses to hire apprentices. Union shops are not affected by this restrictive hiring ratio because the union-sponsored apprentice is indentured to the union hall and not to an individual employer. The arbitrary hiring restriction directly and adversely impacts the ability of homebuilders and remodelers to engage nonunion licensed contractors on a timely basis, adversely impacts the cost of these services and, thereby, increases the cost of home building and remodeling construction projects because our industry is almost entirely nonunion. A 1:1 hiring ratio will support young workers trying to learn a trade by offering them more apprenticeship opportunities and will help to provide needed workers to the residential industry.

Neither the current 3:1 hiring ratio or the proposed intent of RB 133 protects the public's safety because licensed journeyman and apprentices can work on a job site on a 1:1 basis. The 3:1 ratio affects only hiring practices, not work site practices. That makes no sense!

There is no justifiable argument for maintaining the current 3:1 hiring ratio.

Arguments made in the past by the Dept of Labor that it would not be able to ensure a work site 1:1 ratio if the hiring ratio is changed have no merit. The argument that, under a 1:1 hiring ratio, an apprentice cannot work if a journeyman is out sick also has no merit since apprentices are also undertaking and studying coursework and may perform other duties in the shop or elsewhere that do not require the 1:1 work site ratio for the brief time a journeyman might be out sick. Also, DOL can ensure the integrity of apprenticeship training under a 1:1 hiring ratio by simply making certain that reporting and paper trails are maintained and follow the apprentice if an apprentice moves to another employer.

Moreover, the failure to change the hiring ratio in the licensed occupational trades adversely affects our ability to produce job placement benefits for students in our own workforce development program. Throughout the residential construction industry, including both the licensed and non-licensed trades, there have been periodic shortages of skilled workers to supply the industry's needs. These shortages have a direct impact on our industry's ability to supply the housing CT needs. The lack of housing supply in this state is a direct cause of our high housing prices and hampers both the willingness and ability of people to come here or stay here and, consequently, the ability of businesses to grow. The current hiring ratio restrictions are a contributing factor to our periodic workforce shortages in the licensed trades.

All students in the licensed trades, those being trained by unions and nonunion organizations alike, should have every opportunity available to them for placement and the current 3:1 hiring ratio adversely limits their options. The intended change of RB 133 is a small step in the right direction but until the law allows a common sense 1:1 hiring ratio, job growth will be stifled.

Please help the licensed trade portion of the residential construction industry grow its workforce and give younger people trying to enter the licensed trades greater options to obtain quality work. We urge the state to codify the practice of allowing a 1 to 1 hiring ratio of journeyman to apprentice. This important change will maintain current workplace safety rules and the current work site 1 journeyman to 1 apprentice ratio. It will remove a nonsensical barrier to nonunion trade contractors' ability to grow their companies or offer competitive bids on jobs. And it will help reduce the costs faced by home builders and home remodelers.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.