



**Public Hearing Testimony of
Sharon Palmer, Commissioner
Department of Labor
Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 11, 2014**

Good Afternoon Senator Holder-Winfield, Representative Tercyak, Senator Markley and Representative Smith and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with testimony regarding **House Bill No. 5454, AAC Apprenticeship Ratios**. My name is Sharon Palmer and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Labor.

I am here to speak in opposition to this bill. Current law provides apprenticeship and journeyman hiring ratios at a rate that requires employers to hire more journeymen than apprentices. The intent of the law is to ensure that enough journeymen are on staff at any one employer in order to provide adequate mentoring to the apprentices, particularly regarding job training and safety. The proposed bill seeks to decrease significantly the hiring ratios, in many cases at a one to one ratio. I cannot support legislation that would increase the chance that apprentices would not have the proper guidance, thereby threatening their training and safety. Moreover, current law allows the Department to offer ratio relief to employers if needed. When an employer applies to the Department for ratio relief, it allows the agency to examine whether the employer has any outstanding wage or workplace standards or OSHA violations; whether the journeyman list for the employer is accurate, including that the journeymen have the correct licenses; and the completion rates of apprentices with that employer within the last five years. Even if the Department finds that the employer is eligible for ratio relief, relief is not granted at a one to one ratio. Rather, the Department would still require that several more journeymen than apprentices are on staff. As such, the proposed bill would undermine the level of training that our apprentice population should be afforded and that promote qualified licensed workers in the apprenticeship trades.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I am available to answer any questions you may have.