



Connecticut Chapter

Testimony by Chris Syrek, President of
Associated Builders & Contractors

Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee February 17, 2015

SB 81 An Act Concerning Journeymen and Apprentices

Good afternoon, my name is Chris Syrek; I am the President of Associated Builders and Contractors of Connecticut (CT ABC). CT ABC is a statewide trade association of almost 200 members that represents merit shop contractors.

CT ABC is supportive of the intent of SB 81, which would allow contractors to hire more apprentices. However, we believe the best way to ensure that the hiring ratio for journeyman to apprentices reflects the needs of the industry, is for both the trade unions and non-union representatives of construction to study the issue, review applicable data, and agree on an acceptable ratio. We are committed to being a part of this process.

The most significant issues at hand when discussing hiring ratios are providing meaningful career opportunities, ensuring a sustainable workforce for the construction industry, and promoting training and safety on jobsites.

As our economy continues to recover, it is important that we do everything we can to provide opportunity for people who are seeking employment. We believe that construction provides an incredible opportunity for meaningful and successful careers. In many of the trades, a license and a multiyear apprenticeship training program is required before that tradesman can become a fulltime and licensed journeyman. There is a hiring ratio that dictates how many apprentices a contractor can hire, relative to how many licensed journeyman they employ. As the ratio law currently stands, a contractor can only hire one apprentice for every three licensed journeymen. We believe it's worth revisiting that 3 to 1 ratio, to make sure that the law is not acting as a barrier for job creation in the construction industry.

It is also important that we build a workforce in the construction industry that meets the needs of the industry as our economy recovers. Many in the trades left the industry during the recession, and the workforce that remains is aging, with not nearly enough young people entering construction. It is a concern amongst industry experts both nationally and locally that in the coming years there will not be enough skilled workers to meet the demands of a fully recovered economy. Many member companies in our association have expressed the desire to hire and take on more apprentices, but cite the hiring ratio as a barrier. If there is a need for more workers with companies willing to hire – but no mechanism for them to do so – that is truly unfortunate given the economic realities in our state.

Any changes to the current hiring ratio must of course be made with the worker and the safety of the jobsite in mind. It is important that these apprentices receive the appropriate training, and that the standard for safety of every workplace and jobsite remain high. CT ABC and our members are committed to making this a priority.

In conclusion, CT ABC and our members understand how important apprentice hiring ratios are to the industry, and are supportive of an effort to review this process. We offer ourselves as a resource during any legislative discussions, and we thank the committee for your time on this important issue.