



## BUILDING OUR SKILLED TRADES THROUGH APPRENTICESHIP

### **BACKGROUND:**

It is widely recognized that we have a workforce shortage that is growing exponentially as more of our workers are aging out of the workforce. At the same time, the workforce at large is struggling to bring younger workers specifically into the skilled trades to meet current demand but also to circumvent the pace of future retirements. The most effective way to grow the skilled trades workforce is through graduating more registered apprentices so they have a quality education and a future satisfying career in construction.

Registered apprenticeship is a formal “earn while you learn” education program where students work full-time in their industry while attending school part-time. Both state and federal governments recognize all registered apprenticeship programs with no difference between union and non-union apprentice models. Each program has a program sponsor and follows government-approved standards. Program sponsors, such as individual employers or trade associations, ensure apprentice wages are paid, and on-the-job training hours are provided. Programs are typically completed in 4 years, but depending on the industry or trade, it could take more or less time.

To complete a registered apprenticeship, the apprentice must meet both the program-specific related technical instruction and on-the-job training requirements. Once both elements are complete, the person is no longer an apprentice but “graduates” as a journeyman. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania issues them a journeyman certification which is a credential recognized across the United States.

ABC Keystone’s apprenticeship program requires students to complete 144 hours per year of related technical instruction (theory) and 2,000 hours a year of on-the-job training. On-the-job training consists of performing required work processes with appropriate supervision. Tuition is paid by the employer, and students are paid escalating wages as their skills increase. Nearly all registered apprentices finish their program without any student debt as they enter their career.

### **CURRENT CHALLENGE:**

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania has the highest ratio of apprentices to journeymen/supervisors which creates an obstacle to bringing more skilled workers into the economy. This ratio is a result of the 1961 Apprenticeship and Training Act that has left this requirement untouched in over 60 years (coincidentally preceding OSHA as the leading authority on safety in all workspaces). Any apprentice program that is not a joint apprenticeship program (i.e., a non-union program) must have a 4 to 1 ratio – in other words 4 journeymen/supervisors for every 1 apprentice. Unions can negotiate their ratio under collective bargaining, so the number varies but is frequently less than 4:1 and often is as low as 1:1.

This ratio also affects all apprentice programs that extend beyond construction trades to include finance, health care, energy, legal, etc.

A non-union employer is legally obligated to follow the 4:1 ratio in the apprentice program meaning that for every 1 new worker brought onto the job there needs to be 4 journeymen/supervisors: in order to hire 1 worker, 4 experienced workers need to be with them; to hire 2 workers there must be 8 experienced workers; to hire 3 new workers needs 12 experienced workers on the site and so on. This becomes complicated quickly for no other reason than compliance with the law – it does not increase productivity or safety.

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**SOLUTION:**

Through legislation, we can create a direct and equitable way to modernize an outdated state law from 1961 without a disadvantage to any construction worker that is union or non-union.

We support legislation that creates uniform rules to align both union and merit shop models to have comparable apprenticeship ratios. Rep. Gleim has proposed legislation that uses insurance information as an objective metric for all industries to determine the appropriate apprenticeship ratio. This puts all workers on the same playing field with a safety mindset and allows more workers to enter the workforce without an arbitrary cap through the existing 4:1 ratio.

This approach also brings consistency to calculating costs in construction. It is also a model that bases ratios on actual, objective data of injuries/fatalities as a reflection of the need for safety and supervision and has successfully worked in other states such as New York.



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