



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB121:
More Opportunities for Career-Focused Students Act of 2023

TO: Hon. Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair, and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Ioana Stoica, Policy Advocate

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The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that advocates for better jobs, skills training, and wages for low-income workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support Senate Bill 121 as a means of providing high-school students the opportunity to learn about and access apprenticeship programs and vocational training as alternative pathways to job security and employment.

According to the National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, about 64% of Maryland high school graduates enroll in a college program the year after graduating high school, while approximately 24% of Marylanders overall have a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment. Apprenticeships provide employment opportunities throughout Maryland, and create a pathway to higher wage work for those without a college degree.

Employment in the skilled trades is growing: the ten year projected growth for electricians is 14%, for plumbers is 12%, and for carpenters is 6%. These professions provide good wages and oftentimes benefits that are able to support individuals and their families. In Maryland, on average, wages are \$31.97 per hour for master electricians, \$32.70 for plumbers, and \$24.17 for carpenters - well above the minimum wage.

Public high schools should serve all students, regardless of their interest or ability in pursuing higher education, by offering equitable opportunities to learn about these alternative career pathways, and by subsidizing the cost of assessments for vocational certifications. Furthermore, this bill would not only be good for students who wish to enter into gainful employment, but would benefit employers who are facing severe shortages of qualified applicants in a wide range of fields, from bus drivers to electricians to pharmacy technicians and more.

Maryland's secondary education institutions should offer quality instruction at all levels and provide equal access to students wishing to enter the trades through apprenticeship programs. We urge a favorable vote on **Senate Bill 121**.

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