



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 879:

Job Help for All

TO: Chair Guy Guzzone and members of the Senate Budget and Tax 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 879 as a means of expanding access to apprenticeship programs and vocational training as alternative pathways to job security and employment.**

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.

According to the National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 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. Too many Marylanders are still struggling to secure full-time employment and build economic security after the Great Recession. With the growing demand for highly-skilled workers in the labor force, participation in apprenticeships is one of the surest ways to build economic security for people living in or near poverty.

Senate Bill 879 will enable more middle and high-school students to explore career opportunities through experiential learning and by developing relationships with and learning directly from those who work directly in high-impact fields. These experiences have a multitude of benefits: they allow students to apply classroom knowledge in a professional setting, to develop their transferable skills, to build confidence, and to refine their career goals. Instead of being tracked directly into low-wage jobs in order to make ends meet, or into higher education programs that students may not know much about or may not be enthusiastic about, Senate Bill 879 would provide students an alternative that would help them in exploring occupational pathways.

JOTF supports the way that Senate Bill 879 addresses the issue of ensuring quality employment for all Marylanders - first, through providing career counseling programs for

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

middle and high school students developed by workforce experts, schools, and registered apprenticeship programs, and second, by ensuring that Workforce Boards receiving funding adhere to certain requirements, including prioritizing high-school apprenticeships.

The Job Help for All bill will allow for policy changes that will lead Marylanders to building economic security. Investing in the careers of these individuals is not only an investment in their futures, but also the State's economy. For these reasons, **we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 879.**

For more information, contact:

Ioana Stoica / Policy Advocate / ioana@jotf.org / 240-643-0059