



February 27, 2025

The Honorable CT Wilson, Chair
The Honorable Brian Crosby, Vice Chair
House Economic Matters Committee
230 & 231 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Testimony of Ray Baker, Maryland Director, Baltimore DC Metro Building Trades Council on
HB 501: Registered Apprenticeship Investments for a Stronger Economy (RAISE) Act
Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Thank you Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee for the opportunity to offer testimony on HB 501. My name is Ray Baker. I am the Maryland Director of the Baltimore-DC Building Trades (BDCBT). The BDCBT's 28 affiliates represent more than 30,000 union construction workers across Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

The BDCBT supports HB 501, with amendments. This bill contains a number of components we would like to see modified before passage.

First, the bill eliminates the licensing exam for individuals who successfully complete a registered plumbing apprenticeship program. The exam is critical to consumer protection and public safety. Passing the exam demonstrates that a plumber has reached a recognized level of competency. The exam tests plumbers' knowledge of plumbing codes, practices, and safety procedures, ensuring they are qualified to perform various plumbing tasks. By ensuring competency through the exam, the license protects consumers by guaranteeing plumbers meet minimum standards. According to Maryland Code of Regulations, Sec. 09.20.02.03, Examination for Journey Plumber Certificates, the passing grade of 70 is necessary to pass the exam.

This exam is acting as an important consumer protection filter: according to the August 15, 2024 minutes of the Maryland State Board of Plumbing, most recent data available on the Maryland Department of Labor website, between January 2024 and August 15 2024, "400 plumbing candidates were tested, 157 candidates passed, 243 failed for a pass rate of 39%. Since the inception of the test, 11,575 candidates were tested, 4,197 candidates passed, 7,378 failed, for a pass rate of 36%."

Second, the bill authorizes a deviation from the authorized one to one journey worker to apprentice ratio for occupations designated by the Maryland Secretary of Labor as "nonhazardous to workers and members of the public." The bill does not define what is considered nonhazardous, nor does the bill provide any guidance to determine whether a particular occupation is hazardous or nonhazardous. The BDCBT is concerned about leaving such a wide latitude of discretion to the Secretary of Labor.

Third, the bill authorizes the Secretary of Labor to "consider formal written deviation requests from all other occupations" seeking a journey worker to apprentice ratio other than the required one to one ratio. This opens the door for diluting the skilled trades that comprise the construction industry and increasing the potential for construction workplace safety hazards. The key distinction between an apprentice and a journeyman lies in their levels of expertise and responsibilities. Apprentices are entry-level individuals undergoing a formal training program to learn a skilled trade.

They work under the supervision of a seasoned professional, gaining hands-on experience and theoretical knowledge. Apprenticeships are structured and serve as a pathway to mastery in a specific trade.

Journey workers have completed their apprenticeships, attaining a higher level of proficiency and qualification. Journey workers possess the skills and knowledge necessary to work independently in their trade. The journey worker stage represents a significant milestone in a construction professional's career, signifying a higher level of competency and autonomy.

The BDCBT urges a favorable report with the outlined amendments on HB 501.

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