

# PLUMBERS AND PIPEFITTERS APPRENTICESHIP

WASHINGTON, D.C., JOINT PLUMBING APPRENTICE COMMITTEE

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Mechanical Contractors, D.C.  
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U. A. Local Union No. 5  
Washington, D.C.

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Trade professionals have reviewed HB501 and SB431 and have the following comments and concerns:

- **Licensing and Testing:** There is a strong interest in skilled trade apprenticeships in Maryland, especially for licensed journeyman plumbers and gasfitters. The interest is not tied only to the work but also to the benefits and wages that can and should come from a career in skilled construction trades. The Plumbers and Gasfitters Local 5 training facility takes one apprentice for every 10 applicants. However, removing the current testing requirement for journey licensing will not solve the problem of putting more qualified plumbers and gasfitters to work. The licensing test does not ONLY assess basic plumbing knowledge, but evaluates the license applicant's ability to navigate and understand necessarily complex plumbing and fuel gas codes. No amount of field experience replaces such an assessment. A journey-level license allows a plumber/gasfitter to work alone on the most complicated and dangerous plumbing and fuel gas systems. Lowering the "standard of care" to only recognize an apprentice's time in the class and on the jobsite is unwise and unsafe. The testing must remain to ensure that a licensed journey plumber in Maryland can use a current code book and be able to comprehend the regular changes that appear in new code every few years.

- **Plumber/Gasfitter to Apprentice Ratio:** The current standard of one to one (1:1) which could already be considered insufficient, is a threshold which must not be crossed. Classroom training makes up an important, but smaller portion of training time for skilled trade apprentices. The passing on of best practices and jobsite relevant industry knowledge from journeyman to apprentice plumber makes up the bulk of any apprentices training, in sheer hours. Teaching is not constant, but "as time allows" on any jobsite. Each journeyworker has a level of training responsibility to their apprentice. Even now, apprentices are not receiving well-rounded field training. Many companies are promoting the use of "piece workers" who are "installers" of a single piping system or plumbing aspect (e.g. DWV sanitary, water supply piping, groundwork, stormwater, or setting fixtures only). This lack of well-rounded field experience, coupled with a low or mid-level apprenticeship is not producing a qualified Journeyman, who can perform all facets of our trade independently and safely. Plumbing is complex and nuanced. There are multiple systems and a cornucopia of materials and methods for every system. The on-the-job (OTJ) training time for each apprentice is already taxed, with the rapid pace of construction, whether residential, commercial, or industrial. If a **skilled** labor shortage is the crisis our state is facing, then cutting face-to-face OTJ training time cannot be a reasonable answer.

- **Funding and Grants:** A model exists for the funding of training apprentices which requires no contribution from the state. While funding schools for pre-apprenticeships is

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encouraged and welcome, there are pipe-trades and plumbing apprenticeships which fully funded and sustained by their members and contractors. It has been shown for Christopher G. Biondi, Training Director

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nearly 100 years that contractors can easily share the cost of building qualified apprentices with the journeyman plumbers and apprentices they hire. That cooperation has funded the most technologically advanced apprentice training centers in the state and beyond, even setting a regional standard for training excellence outside of Maryland. There is no need to fund apprenticeship training beyond supporting the efforts of K-12 public school pre-apprenticeships and county CTE programs. Those are the programs which create interest in construction trades apprenticeships. Those schools, and quality, longstanding plumbing apprenticeships are where Maryland grows the top future journeyman plumbers. It is worth noting that those existing, strong apprenticeships have no issues with graduating licensed plumbers who pass their licensing exams the first, or on rare occasion, the second time.

- Further Notes:
  - The proposed legislation falls short of recognizing that backflow training is also a requirement under State law and also does not align with current requirements for license examinations.
  - The proposed legislation establishes an uneven playing field that punishes an apprentice in any upper tier apprenticeship program and rewards an apprentice from a less stringent program (as in a pieceworker mentioned above). An upper tier, 5-year program does not graduate an apprentice until said apprentice completes 1250+ hours of formal classroom training and has earned their Journey-level Plumbing/Gasfitting licenses through examination. Under the proposed bill other apprentices in a program that only offers 250-400 hours of formal training may earn a license (without examination) and with only three to four years of trade experience. This creates a lack of incentive to create skilled plumbers and rewards anyone who builds under-skilled installers.
  - The bill as written waters down significantly the importance of knowledge, safety, and installation quality, affecting the end product consumers will receive and compromising the safety both Plumbers/Gasfitters, and the plumbing end-users.
- For Closing Consideration: A licensing protocol for lawyers or doctors that follow the model of this legislation:  
Where the current model uses extensive post graduate education, followed by the Medical or Law Boards Examinations versus, a theoretical program that would only feature 25-33% of the typical post graduate education and not require a Medical or Law Board Examination for one to become board-licensed in either field.

Which professional would you prefer to have treating or representing you?