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Walter L. Simmons, President

Bill Number:	Senate Bill 431
Title:	Registered Apprenticeship Investments for a Stronger Economy (RAISE) Act
Committee:	Finance
Hearing Date:	February 19, 2025
Position:	FAVORABLE

Employ Prince George's, Inc. ("EPG") is a nonprofit organization that serves as the principal workforce development entity for Prince George's County and is responsible for regulating policy development and the administration of workforce activities related to services and programs funded by the federal Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA).

As an organization committed to advancing economic mobility through workforce development, we enthusiastically support the RAISE Act and the opportunities it presents to expand access to registered apprenticeships across Maryland.

Registered apprenticeships have long been recognized as a powerful tool for bridging the gap between education and employment, particularly in industries experiencing persistent workforce shortages. These programs offer earn-and-learn opportunities that equip individuals with in-demand skills while simultaneously addressing employers' talent needs. However, outdated regulations and restrictive ratios have hampered efforts to scale apprenticeships in Maryland. SB 431 represents a critical step forward by streamlining the process for expanding apprenticeship ratios for nonhazardous occupations.

By empowering the Maryland Department of Labor to adjust these ratios, the RAISE Act will facilitate the growth of apprenticeships in sectors like healthcare, information technology, advanced manufacturing, and other high-demand industries essential to Maryland's economic vitality. Likewise, the creation of a dedicated office focused on registered apprenticeship development will enhance the state's ability to coordinate, promote, and support apprenticeship initiatives. A centralized office will refine program approval processes, increase public awareness of apprenticeship opportunities, and ensure alignment with Maryland's broader workforce development goals.

Financial incentives can significantly enhance employer participation in apprenticeship programs, particularly in industries with tight margins or limited hiring capacity. The proposed incentive program will encourage more employers to engage in apprenticeship development while simultaneously opening pathways to well-paying, family-sustaining careers for Maryland residents.

The RAISE Act is more than a legislative proposal; it is an investment in Maryland's future workforce. By modernizing apprenticeship regulations, establishing key support structures, and providing critical incentives, this bill will expand opportunities for Marylanders to build careers in high-demand fields while supplying businesses with the talent they need to thrive. For these reasons, Employ Prince George's respectfully urges the committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 431.