

SB 431 – Registered Apprenticeship Investments for a Stronger Economy (RAISE) Act
Senate Finance Committee
February 19, 2025
Favorable

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Tasha Cornish, and I serve as the Executive Director of Cybersecurity Association, Inc., an organization dedicated to strengthening Maryland's cybersecurity and IT workforce. I am here to express our strong support for SB 431, the Registered Apprenticeship Investments for a Stronger Economy (RAISE) Act.

Cybersecurity and IT are among the fastest-growing industries in Maryland, yet employers across the state are struggling to find skilled workers to meet demand. Apprenticeships present an effective, scalable solution to this workforce gap, offering hands-on experience and mentorship while creating direct pathways to well-paying, in-demand careers. SB 431 introduces key reforms that will allow Maryland to expand and modernize apprenticeship opportunities, particularly in industries like cybersecurity and IT.

One of the most critical changes in SB 431 is the modernization of journey-person-to-apprentice ratio requirements for nonhazardous occupations. These ratios, originally designed for traditional trades where close supervision is necessary for safety, currently act as a limiting factor in fields like cybersecurity and IT, where such supervision is not required. The bill takes a more flexible and industry-appropriate approach by allowing the Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Council to adjust ratio requirements for nonhazardous industries. This ensures that employers in the technology sector can train more apprentices at one time, expanding the cybersecurity workforce without compromising training quality.

Another important component of SB 431 is the creation of the Maryland Office of Registered Apprenticeship Development. By establishing a dedicated office focused on apprenticeship expansion, the state will streamline coordination across agencies, provide centralized resources for employers, and ensure Maryland remains a leader in workforce development. For businesses considering apprenticeship programs, having a single point of contact within the state will reduce administrative barriers and encourage greater participation.

The bill also recognizes the essential role of intermediaries in building and scaling apprenticeship programs, particularly in cybersecurity and IT, where employer engagement and program development require specialized expertise. However, high startup costs often prevent new intermediaries from launching programs or expanding existing efforts. SB 431 addresses this challenge by establishing the Registered Apprenticeship Qualified Intermediary Program, which provides funding to help these organizations develop employer partnerships, create training pipelines, and scale apprenticeship opportunities.

Finally, one of the most significant barriers to apprenticeship adoption is the cost to employers. SB 431 addresses this challenge through the Maryland Apprenticeship Incentive Program Fund, which introduces a pay-per-apprentice funding model. This approach has been highly effective in other states, including California, Iowa, and Pennsylvania, where similar funding mechanisms have driven significant apprenticeship growth. By ensuring predictable, sustained funding, Maryland can give employers the confidence to invest in apprenticeships for the long term, making these programs a viable workforce development strategy rather than a short-term

initiative dependent on temporary grants.

SB 431 is a critical investment in Maryland's workforce and economic future. By modernizing outdated regulations, establishing dedicated state support, strengthening key intermediaries, and creating sustainable funding mechanisms, this bill ensures that Maryland's apprenticeship system can grow to meet industry demand—particularly in high-growth fields like cybersecurity and IT.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to give SB 431 a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.

Tasha Cornish
Executive Director