

# INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS



LOCAL 99

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Hon. Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.  
Chairman  
House Committee on Corporations  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Opposition as submitted to H-5764; AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS – ELECTRICIANS**

Dear Chairman Solomon,

As Business Manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 99, I represent 800 Women and Men who work in the Electrical Industry in the State of Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts. Within this role, I dedicate my life as a steward of the industry and not solely a representative of the organized craft workers.

It is my belief that **H-5764** will replace **H-5437** in this evening's hearing. **H-5764** has some modified language from **H-5437** on basically the same bill which has led me to this conclusion.

I have spoken to Representative Edwards regarding my concerns with the bill, as currently proposed, and I believe we agree there is some work to do. I intend to be available for verbal tonight also, in the event I have not covered any aspect succinctly.

There are two sections of the existing statute **RIGL 5-6-24** that are addressed in **H-5764**. My position with this legislation, as with all legislation, is that it should never offer unfair advantages to any person or party when it is framed.

This bill, as currently drafted, corrects a previously granted advantage but creates another. All electrical programs that currently receive credit for classroom related instruction in the State of Rhode Island are designed in the same fashion. The time-tested and time-proven structure is to have students attend their classroom instruction concurrently with their on the job training. In my many years as a technical instructor and a field General Foreman, I can attest that this method has stood the test of time, whereas it is the single best way to train those who wish to excel in the industry. This model is essentially one hundred and forty-four (144) hours, per year, of related instruction in the classroom as the apprentice works in the field, for two thousand (2000) hours per year, blending the knowledge from all learning modalities.

Creating a new classification for a *trade school* has its own set of concerns. The bill has worked to address those concerns from **H-5437** to **H-5764** by installing some safeguards to assure that not just anyone could hang a shingle, call themselves a trade school, and churn out students on every street corner. I am not objecting to adding the language to allow a *fully accredited trade school that has been approved by the Rhode Island office of post-secondary commissioner and by the Rhode Island department of labor and training*. I do, however, object to allowing a front loaded two hundred and eighty-eight (288) hours of credit. If trade schools are to be allowed, they should follow the same model as every other program for the following reasons. Trade school students are only students and unlike apprentices, they will not be integrating critical field experience working with a contractor on actual functioning jobsites alongside their related classroom instruction. The majority of students can and do choose to be registered apprentices and participate in

related instructions at night and work in the field during the day. Without this collaboration, the student will not be able to properly apply their craft in the field with what was gained in the classroom. Conversely, the student will not be able to discuss the day's jobsite events and challenges with the instructor and classmates that evening, which is absolutely the most beneficial learning module I have ever experienced.

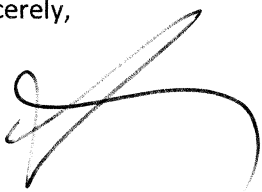
Allowing any accepted trade school to have the ability to *offer* two hundred and eighty-eight (288) hours of credit with no set time frame, literally would allow any business to run a full time school and turn out students with the credit of two years of classroom training in as quick as seven weeks. That is, of course, if the trade school followed the presumed intent of the bill and not how the proposal is worded. As it is currently worded there is a significant risk that a less than honorable trade school could exploit the language: "*may receive credit.....or two hundred and eighty-eight (288) hours of classroom training gained upon successful completion of a course of study in a fully accredited trade school that has been approved by the Rhode Island office of post-secondary commissioner and by the Rhode Island department of labor and training*". The language clearly spells out what the student "may" receive but falls short to connect that same hourly requirement to the course of study which is very concerning.

Lastly, on this portion of the bill, we must understand the impact on the apprentice trying to survive in the industry. In any given year there are more than five hundred and fifty (550) registered electrical apprentices hoping to work every day in Rhode Island and gain their required On the Job Training hours. Today the industry can support the existing apprentice population but only a few years ago there were a massive amount of young men and women out of work. The current model allows for a slow integration into the field. If we were to allow two hundred and eighty-eight (288) hours as written, over the standard one hundred and forty-four (144) hours per academic year, we will open the flood gates for oversaturation of the entry level apprentice pool. This can predictably lead to the exploitation of the worker who will work for the least amount of money. We already have challenges with apprentice sponsors burning through young apprentices and replacing them with someone who will work for less as they climb the vocational ladder. Adding an untold amount of students, who must then try to become an apprentice, potentially every seven weeks would be disastrous to the unrepresented apprentice. That problem would grow exponentially if you had a throng of trade school businesses looking to open up shop with this new language. This has the potential to have a cascading effect forcing reduction in apprentice ratios and displacing older journey level workers simply to employ a large population of new apprentices.

The second portion of both **H-5437** and **H-5764** corrects an unfair advantage given to some students, enrolled in one particular program, who receive credit for two (2) years of on the job training that did not actually happen. I do not believe anyone could honestly disagree that this inequity should be corrected.

In conclusion, if the trade school language (Page 2 line 4/5/6) is modified to meet the standard model of one hundred and forty-four (144) hours per academic year, two hundred and eighty-eight (288) hours total, then we would be in support. We are already in support of the second modification as proposed (page 2 line 18/19) to bring in line with all other programs by requiring on the job training to occur in order to receive credit for same.

Sincerely,



Joseph L. Walsh, Jr.

cc: Representative John G. Edwards  
Lou Mansolillo / Committee Clerk  
Paul Macdonald / IBEW Local Union Lobbyist  
Committee Members