

Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Opposition to H8277 – Impact on Trade Licensure Pathways

Dear

Please accept this letter as formal opposition to House Bill 8277, specifically the section that eliminates or reduces credit toward licensure hours for students who complete an associate degree in a relevant trade.

I write from the perspective of a Rhode Island employer who depends on a skilled, reliable, and growing trades workforce. Like many employers across the state, we consistently struggle to recruit qualified trade professionals and maintain a steady talent pipeline. Rhode Island already faces significant workforce shortages in the trades, and H8277 would make entry into these careers more difficult at a time when we should be doing the opposite.

For decades, Rhode Island has successfully recognized associate degree programs in the trades as a legitimate and effective pathway into licensure. This model has worked well. Graduates of these programs enter the workforce with strong hands-on technical training, exposure to current technologies, and the professional and communication skills needed to succeed in real-world, customer-facing environments. From an employer standpoint, these graduates often require less onboarding time and fewer corrective hours than individuals entering with no prior formal education.

While apprenticeship programs are an important part of the trades ecosystem, they should not be treated as the *only* valid route. Associate degree programs complement apprenticeships by producing workers who are better prepared on day one and who can contribute meaningfully to our operations sooner. Removing licensure credit for completed degree programs devalues this education and discourages individuals from pursuing a proven pathway into the trades.

The credit toward licensure hours currently granted to associate degree holders is not a shortcut, it is a recognition of documented training and classroom-based instruction already completed. Eliminating this credit will delay earning potential, reduce access to living wages, and create a financial barrier for students who have already invested time and money into their education. Ultimately, this makes the trades less attractive to young people and career-changers alike.

As an employer, we rely heavily on graduates from Rhode Island's trade-focused higher education institutions. This pipeline has served our business and the state's economy well. Weakening it through H8277 would hurt employers, educational institutions, and the very workers our labor laws should be supporting.

Rhode Island does not need legislation that narrows access to the trades or removes longstanding, effective licensure pathways. We need policies that encourage workforce participation, respect multiple routes to competency, and address our ongoing labor shortages.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the House Committee on Labor to oppose H8277 as written and to preserve licensure credit for associate degree graduates in the relevant trades.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your continued attention to the needs of Rhode Island's workforce and employers.

Sincerely,

Larry Gemma

Retired President

Gem Plumbing

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