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Senate introduces Apprenticeship Ratio Bill

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It's a new legislative session, and already, senator Dominic Ruggerio has introduced the controversial Apprenticeship Ratio Bill that the ABC membership fought so hard to kill in the 2009 session.

The bill has not been scheduled for a hearing yet, but it is certainly not too early to contact your state senator and voice your opposition to this bill, which will not only hurt small businesses, but will also impose apprenticeship ratios on companies that are not in licensed trades...and therefore not even required to have apprentices.

Most ABC members know where this legislation is coming from, but here is a thumbnail sketch of the motivation behind the trade unions pushing for this bill:

For years, unions have negotiated inflated journey person to apprentice ratios in order to protect their journey person members. It would appear that there has been a concern that having too many apprentices might threaten the members' jobs.

Beginning in 2007, the State Apprenticeship Council, which is heavily controlled and influenced by the trade unions, has been trying to impose these ratios on all construction companies (union and non-union). Why? Because these ratios have proven to make the union companies that have to abide by them rather uncompetitive with non-union companies who are currently allowed to operate one to one (one apprentice for each journey person). The unions have various ratios, depending on the particular negotiated bargaining agreement under which they operate, from one to one for plumbers (because plumbers are one to one by state law) all the way up to five to one.

The unions claim safety is their motivation in attempting to force these higher ratios on the entire industry, but they have never been able to produce a single study to back up this assertion. (Rumor has it the State Apprenticeship Council may be attempting to conduct its own study...but you can imagine how biased that would be).

In a survey of its members in 2009, ABC found that if non-union contractors and subcontractors were forced to abide by the unions' higher ratios, more than 100 employees would immediately lose their jobs. This argument, more than any, probably helped ABC and RIBA to convince enough legislators to vote to sustain a veto of the 2009 version of the bill. With enough votes to sustain the veto in existence, the legislature never bothered to bring it up for an override vote.

But, it's a new year, and a new legislative session, so the bill is back...at least in the Senate (S-2371). It's likely there will be a companion bill in the House. So it's important that all ABC members call or email their senators and representatives to voice your opposition to this bill.

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