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RIBA opposes RI apprenticeship rules

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The Rhode Island Builders Association plans to join with the Associated Builders and Contractors - Rhode Island Chapter (ABC-RI) in opposing new state regulations that would require five journeymen to one trainee in some non-licensed occupations, including carpenters and bricklayers, in both residential and commercial work.

The apprenticeship rules, issued by the state Dept. of Labor and Training (DLT), are "a disaster in the making for non-union contractors," said Robert Baldwin of R.B. Homes Inc., RIBA secretary and chairman of the association's Education and Workforce Development Committee.

"Most of our members are small contractors, and they don't have five journeymen. This rule could eliminate on-the-job training in some very important trades that our members use."

Training ratios for painters, laborers, plasterers, masons, glaziers and roofers remain at one-to-one.

"These regulations were put into effect despite the fact that the vast majority of witnesses in a packed room at the public hearing testified against them." Baldwin said. "DLT was warned that the impact on small businesses would be very serious."

He emphasized that the new rules make it harder for young people to get into these trades, not easier.

"These regulations are more restrictive because only large companies and unions are going to have that many journeymen. With the average age of a member of the labor force now at 55 years old, there is no logic to this decision."

Baldwin expressed additional amazement at the decision because construction is one of the top three industries for job creation in Rhode Island.

"That's been true for quite awhile and is projected to be true for at least the next 20 years. So you have a job-growth area with a workforce approaching retirement, yet they adopt regulations with ratios that make it exceptionally difficult for new people to get into these trades," Baldwin said.

At its April 1st meeting, RIBA's board of directors voted to join with ABC-RI in opposing the regulations. Watch The Rhode Island Builder Report for more information, or call RIBA at (401) 438-7400.

Paul Eno is the owner and editor-in-chief of New River Press, Woonsocket.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540