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Apprenticeship ratios hinder construction job growth

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Unemployment is rising amid a pandemic and it's clear the country needs jobs. The construction industry has jobs available – all we need is to be freed of the restrictions that keep us from filling them. That includes strict apprenticeship ratio requirements.

Mass. has an apprenticeship requirement for all public work. The problem is the ratios of journeypersons to apprentices in many trades. Instead of the traditional one apprentice for each journeyperson, some trades require four or even five journeypersons for each employee. These ratios cripple contractors' ability to fill the jobs that so many people desperately need.

Even amid a deep recession, 80% of contractors are having trouble finding qualified workers to fill hourly jobs. Nationally, the construction industry will need an additional 500,000 workers in 2021 alone.

These are good jobs with tremendous career potential. In an industry that has become exponentially more sophisticated thanks to technology, construction offers lucrative careers that can be accessed without massive college debt.

The key to making construction jobs available to the many Massachusetts residents who so desperately need and want them is to relax unreasonable apprenticeship ratios that act as a barrier to employment. Employers, labor organizations, and political leaders should work together to eliminate these unnecessary barriers while continuing to cultivate safety on the job site. Doing so would benefit contractors, provide an opportunity for job seekers, and facilitate the many construction projects that can help the state economy recover from COVID-19 and the recession it has caused.

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