

ALASKA AFL-CIO

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VINCE BELTRAMI
Executive President



JAKE METCALFE
Secretary / Treasurer

March 10, 2020

Chair Spohnholz and members
House Labor and Commerce Committee
State Capital Building
Juneau, Alaska

Subject: Support for HB 301

Dear Chair Spohnholz:

The Alaska AFL CIO Supports statutory changes that strengthen life and safety protections for workers and consumers. We believe regulatory changes are too easy to change by every Administration, such as the recent changes proposed to the regulations related to the Department of Labor's requirements as it relates to certificates of fitness and apprenticeship requirements. We had hoped the public comments would be given more attention in the regulation process but many time they are not.

The Alaska AFL-CIO believes strongly that Apprenticeship Training Programs saves lives of the workers but it also improves life and safety for users. We in the trades believe that good training programs are so important that we invest millions of dollars annually of our own money to fund them.

The Alaska AFL-CIO understands the high cost of doing inspections, having oversight, and providing training, but until every contractor, home builder and worker does what's right just because its the right thing to do, inspection and oversight are needed.

I have personally fallen victim to some of the cutting corners to save time and money to the tune of thousands of dollar of repairs to my house. Sewer vent pipes that where just cut off in the wall that rotted walls, floors and joists. Live (hot) electric wires just left in the walls; wires that were just twisted and taped that started smoldering in the wall. Thank God for a smoke detector waking us up for that one.

Chair Spohnholz and members of the Labor & Commerce Committee, HB 301 does not increase or decrease any code changes or inspection requirement. It just sets the current standard of training required to receive a certificate of fitness in statute. This training is important to protect the life, safety, and health of everyone that is why we support HB 301 and ask for your vote of support.

Sincerely,

Don Etheridge
Alaska AFL-CIO

ALASKA JOINT ELECTRICAL APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAINING TRUST



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January 13, 2020

Commissioner Ledbetter:

I am writing to you as the director of the largest electrical apprenticeship training program in Alaska, as a person who has spent the majority of my adult life in the electrical industry, as a former director of the department's Labor Standards and Safety Division, and as a lifelong Alaskan with a deep commitment to the state's present and future vitality. Through my firsthand knowledge and experience with the electrical and plumbing trades, the utility and construction industries, and from my discussions with a wide variety of stakeholders, I can say that the proposed changes to certificates of fitness will have a deeply negative impact on our skilled plumbing and electrical industries. The most pronounced negative impact will be on the core workforce whose collective competence grants us trust in our infrastructure, our homes, hospitals, and power plants, and allows everyday Alaskan's the ability to live and go to work without worrying about the dangers that shoddy electrical and plumbing work can pose. The current proposal should be withdrawn, and the department should actively engage stakeholders to build effective regulations, and to enhance work opportunities in these industries.

The proposed changes will result in a weakening of the robust workforce development institutions currently in place for these critical trades. This proposal creates bidding advantages for employers choosing not to utilize apprenticeship, despite the department's historical support for this nationally-recognized pathway for developing a competent workforce. The biggest potential bidding advantage would go to those employers partnering with public education programs, despite the reality that no public education programs in Alaska produce qualified electrical or plumber journeymen. The proposal would eliminate the training requirements that support the statutory intent for these licenses - to ensure that our skilled plumbers and electrical workers actually know what they're doing. In the case of our most hazardous trade, the lineman first responders who restore power when disaster strikes, this proposal appears to eliminate standards for competency altogether. By eliminating any meaningful training component from trainee licenses, and increasing the hours required before potential journeymanship, this proposal allows and encourages the use of seasonal out-of-state cheap labor in place of training Alaskans for success. Without support for the critical Alaskan training programs, we lose the ability, as a state, to facilitate competence in the workplace, and protect the health and safety of Alaskans.

This letter is not intended to provide technical criticism or suggestions for improvement. Instead, it is a plea for the department to engage in a public process. It is clear from my discussions with stakeholders that the department has not consulted with representatives from the affected industries. A meaningful discussion with employers, training organizations, unions, inspectors, and safety experts will help the department develop effective improvements to these regulations, avoiding an unfortunate morass of unintended consequences. Fortunately, at this point, nothing has yet been set in stone.

It is critically important to engage the people who are affected directly by these regulations. Talk with the public and workplace safety experts who understand the importance of competence in electrical and plumbing work. Engage the hardworking men and women who understand life in these skilled trades, and those who could lose opportunities if career pathways are turned into dead ends. Speak with the businesses: the public and private utilities, the contractors, and the homebuilders whose lifeblood is the skilled workforce fostered by apprenticeship. Consult with the organizations that work tirelessly to train hundreds of Alaskans yearly to work safely and effectively in our electrical and plumbing industries.

As we mourn the loss of labor commissioner and Alaskan legend Tom Cashen, his admonition echoes in our minds. "Alaska shouldn't be a chickenshit place to work." We should all remember these words as we work to build Alaska's future. Sweeping changes such as these should not be developed in darkness. The state should engage with Alaskans to improve the systems that keep our state a safe and healthy place to work and live.

I look forward to strengthening our relationship with your department as we develop our state's skilled workforce. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at any time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dm', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Deborah Kelly
Director, Alaska Joint Electrical Apprenticeship and Training Trust



March 10, 2020

The House Labor & Commerce Committee
Alaska House of Representatives
State Capital Building
Juneau, Alaska

Subject: Questions/Concerns on HB301, relating to certificates of fitness

Dear Chair Spohnholz and Committee Members:

The Alaska State Home Building Association appreciates the opportunity to comment on HB301, relating to certificates of fitness for plumbers and electricians, and supports apprenticeships.

We support fewer statutory barriers for training and generating skilled trades in Alaska, and have long supported state funding for programs in workforce development.

HB301 appears to address legislative mistrust of administration regulatory authority by creating barriers to possibilities for training and generating Alaska skilled trades.

Residential construction contractors do not want and do not need to be included in AS 18.62 for certificates of fitness. We are already well covered, and don't wish to be included in legislation that tightens controls on apprenticeships and other possible avenues to skilled trades.

Regulatory costs in Alaska can vary significantly across the state, but they translate into the cost of housing. According to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), regulatory costs account for nearly 25% of the price of building a single-family home and more than 30% of the cost of a typical multifamily development. This includes planning & zoning approvals, environmental mitigation, permits, government fees, and regulatory compliance.

These regulatory structures already provide numerous safety standards and enforcement. In addition to certificates of fitness standards, all construction trades are federally and state regulated, through agencies such as OSHA and Labor Safety & Standards. There are also state building codes for plumbing and electrical.

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In addition, residential construction is licensed separately under AS 08.18.025, which includes requirements for state-regulated insurance. There are also local municipal residential building codes, which include inspections. And market forces dictate close attention to mortgage financing requirements, which typically include code compliance and energy efficiency standards.

Conversely, state law excludes certificates of fitness for residential construction performed by owner-builders. This exemption (AS 08.18.161) includes provisions on how owner-builders can list and sell new construction that can include self-installed plumbing and electrical.

There are also examples of modular homes (and other structures) constructed outside Alaska and shipped here. The plumbing and electrical in these units are installed in another state, with little or no assurance whether the work was performed by a licensed plumber or electrician.

ASHBA has long supported a statewide residential building code, and has appreciated the legislature's consideration of HB76, adoption of state residential building code. Consideration of adopting a state residential building code has brought forth conflicts between residential building codes and the corresponding qualifications for certificate of fitness subject to the state's plumbing code (the Uniform Plumbing Code administered by the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials). This has stymied our goal of raising construction standards for housing through well established and sound building codes.

HB301 strengthens federally registered apprenticeship programs, but it does not help housing.

If enacted, HB301 should remove residential construction from the certificates of fitness for plumbers and electricians.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Banaszak', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Victor Banaszak, President
Alaska State Home Building Association

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ANCHORAGE ALASKA AREA PIPE TRADES LOCAL 367
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Representative Gabrielle LeDoux,

I would like to personally thank you for your sponsoring HB 301. I do believe that having licenses to perform plumbing and electrical work is important for the safety of our public. Without the support of you and the other representatives I believe that the public may have been placed in a potential safety risk. Again, Thank you for the sponsoring of this Bill.

Sincerely,

Jason Fernandes
Training Coordinator
Local 367