



**Written Testimony of Director of the Apprenticeship and Training Office Eric Ramsay
Department of Labor & Industry**

**Before the Senate Labor and Industry Committee
regarding the future of apprenticeship programs in Pennsylvania**

**Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
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Good morning/afternoon. Many thanks to Chairwoman Baker, Chairwoman Tartaglione, and the rest of the committee for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Eric Ramsay, and I am the Director of the newly created Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO). I have been working on issues of apprenticeship and training since I first joined the Bureau of Labor Law Compliance in 1999 during the Ridge Administration, and through four subsequent administrations. During my time at Labor Law Compliance, I most recently worked as the program manager for Apprenticeship and Training. My duties included reviewing apprenticeship compliance issues, maintaining the records of the registered apprenticeship programs, and serving as the administrative arm of the Apprenticeship and Training Council. Those experiences will serve me well in my new position.

I'm here today to discuss SB 761 and SB 280, and how they will affect apprenticeship and training programs. But first let me give you some background about the system we currently have in place.

The Apprenticeship and Training Office was created to increase the commonwealth's involvement in the overall growth of apprenticeship in Pennsylvania. The ATO has several goals in addition to strengthening our traditional apprenticeship base within the construction, manufacturing, and service industries. We also plan to expand the registered apprenticeship model to non-traditional occupations, increase outreach efforts to those who are unaware of the benefits of registered apprenticeship, and to give apprenticeship opportunities to under-represented communities, such as youth, women, and minorities.

As of 2015, there were 722 registered apprenticeship programs in Pennsylvania. These programs trained 13,206 apprentices across the state in industries ranging from manufacturing and construction to corrections. The skills learned in these programs will place the individuals on a career path to family-sustaining wages and a middle class lifestyle.

Pennsylvania's current apprenticeship system is overseen by the Pennsylvania Apprenticeship and Training Council (PATC). Historically, PATC and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) have operated under an informal partnership, whereby DOL performed registration functions and compliance reviews for PATC. More recently DOL has insisted that the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (L&I) take on more field work because of staff attrition on the federal level.

Prior to 2001, DOL had approximately 10 Apprenticeship and Training Representatives (ATRs) throughout the commonwealth, plus a dedicated State Director, Assistant Director, and clerical support, assigned to Pennsylvania. DOL handled the recruitment, registration, and compliance checks for registered programs, while the state apprenticeship bureau maintained most of the paperwork. DOL gradually reduced its complement through attrition and now only has one soon-to-retire ATR for the entire commonwealth and a Multi-State Director and Administrative Assistant who also oversee operations in three other states. As a result, most of DOL's previous responsibilities have fallen to L&I.

PATC consists of representatives of employers, workers, and public members, all of whom are considered experts in apprenticeship and training, and are appointed by the Governor. The diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences of the PATC members equip them with the knowledge base to make policies that hold Pennsylvania's apprenticeship programs to high standards of quality.

Currently, the council makeup includes owners and employees, union and non-union representatives, and some underrepresented demographics in gender and race. The diversity of the council best serves the commonwealth because it is representative of our business and labor communities. As diverse as the council is now, we believe that it can represent Pennsylvania even better by adding more members from underrepresented groups such as veterans, workforce development boards, minority and women's organizations, community colleges and technical schools, and those from the disability community.

One key factor that the council has maintained throughout the years is a journeyperson-to-apprentice ratio of 4 to 1. The experts on the council agree that this requirement produces proper training for apprentices, which ensures safety and quality, and makes projects more likely to be completed on time and at cost.

In December of 2008, federal regulations were adopted that required all states to have a single state apprenticeship agency report directly to DOL. The federal government has given PATC continuing recognition, along with apprenticeship and training councils in 26 other states and the District of Columbia.

Let me dispel with the myth that PATC is not in compliance with DOL requirements. Our current apprenticeship and training system does not currently align with the federal Executive Order, but that does not mean that we are out of compliance. PATC is a fully functioning council, and DOL's multi-state director attends the monthly meetings. DOL sends programs to PATC for approval and recognizes the programs that it approves.

Additionally, when a complaint occurs within the apprenticeship community in Pennsylvania, DOL refers the complaint to me in the newly created Apprenticeship and Training Office. After I review the complaints, I refer them to the Bureau of Labor Law Compliance for investigation.

There are two bills that seek to change the apprenticeship and training system. We oppose SB 761, because it would cede control of our system to the federal government. The state would lose all jurisdiction over registered programs, standards, and compliance of apprenticeship programs in Pennsylvania. Instead, the federal Department of Labor would have complete control over apprenticeship in Pennsylvania.

This would mean that the representative council I mentioned previously would cease to exist, and Pennsylvania's key stakeholders would be cut out of the decision-making process. SB 761 would completely eliminate the commonwealth's ability to control how registered apprenticeships operate in the state and could permit lower journeyperson-to-apprentice ratios, thereby negatively affecting safety and training.

Even in the unlikely event that DOL were to rebuild the necessary infrastructure within the state, it would take years before Pennsylvania would have a fully functioning agency servicing apprenticeship. Registration of new programs and compliance checks for existing programs would be nearly non-existent for an extended period of time. Furthermore, there would undoubtedly be a long delay for apprentices who completed programs to receive their journeyperson certificates, because DOL has not performed this function in Pennsylvania in many years.

L&I also opposes SB 280 because it would likewise gut the commonwealth's ability to control how registered apprenticeships operate in the state and lower journey-person-to-apprentice ratios. The bill would permit DOL to have a louder voice and take more control over the state apprentice standards, instead of keeping decision-making with the PATC whose members are more concerned with Pennsylvania's priorities.

SB 280 would effectively concentrate powers concerning registration, ratios, and compliance in an Executive Director. The politics of changing administrations could, therefore, affect these important features of apprenticeship programs. The current PATC members' staggered terms help to ensure continuity of how apprenticeship is administered in Pennsylvania.

The bill would eliminate the current long-standing regulations that provide for a 4-to-1 ratio of journey-person to apprentices, or permit programs to set their ratios through the collective bargaining process. The 1-journey-person-to-2 apprentice ratio in the bill is far below the standard currently required in any trade; haphazardly reducing ratios for all programs potentially would make Pennsylvania's workplaces less safe and provide poorer on-the-job training than the current act's requirements. Current Pennsylvania law is flexible enough to permit lower ratios for individual programs upon application, review, and approval from PATC.

Pennsylvania's apprenticeship and training programs are among the best in not only the country but the world. In fact, individuals from other countries travel here to train in our system. We do not believe that it's in the best interest of Pennsylvania's businesses, workers, and apprentices to roll back half a century of proven excellence in worker training.

The current apprenticeship and training system with the PATC has been operating effectively and with the approval of the federal Department of Labor for many years. The new Apprenticeship and Training Office will build upon that success by further supporting existing programs, expanding apprenticeship programs to new industries, and doing outreach to underserved constituencies. All of this is happening while maintaining local control of the program, to better meet the needs of Pennsylvania's workers and businesses.

Thank you again for your time, and I'd be happy to take any questions you may have.