

**Testimony on House Bill 4813 before the Senate Michigan Competitiveness Committee
On behalf of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Michigan State Conference
February 24, 2016**

Good morning Chairman Shirkey and members of the committee. My name is Todd Tennis, and I am here on behalf of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Michigan State Conference. The conference is opposed to House Bill 4813 in its current form.

House Bill 4813 seeks to shift the current 1:1 ratio between journeyman electricians and apprentices to a 1:3 ratio. The IBEW has grave concerns about how this will impact both workplace safety and the training environment when this bill would allow potentially three times as many apprentices on a worksite licensed journeymen. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers supports the continuation of the 1:1 ratio because it promotes improved workplace safety, quality training, and good-paying construction jobs.

The current 1:1 ratio was designed to ensure that apprentice electricians – who by definition are not fully trained – were adequately supervised by fully trained journeymen. Construction sites are by their very nature dangerous work environments for all workers, but the hazards navigated by individuals working with electrical equipment and electrical infrastructure are even more potentially deadly. Apprentices who are inadequately supervised are at a high risk of making errors that can lead to injury and death for themselves, their fellow workers, and the site's owners and customers. Maintaining a 1:1 ratio helps minimize these risks.

1. Safety

Construction sites are inherently dangerous places but even more so when working with electrical equipment. Untrained apprentices working without direct supervision from a journeyman not only are at higher risk for injury and death for themselves, but are more likely to make mistakes that could injure others. The 1:1 apprenticeship ratio helps minimize safety risks.

2. Training

The journeyman/apprentice system ensures that apprentices will be mentored in the proper techniques for working with electrical wiring and equipment. It is a large responsibility for a journeyman to provide training for one apprentice while also completing their own assigned tasks. Requiring a journeyman to train up to three apprentices is much more difficult and will have a significant negative impact on the ability of those apprentices to properly learn the trade.

3. Disincentive for hiring trained electricians

Proponents of the legislation assert that expanding the apprenticeship ratio will allow electrical contractors to hire more staff. It is unlikely that any employer would hire more employees than they need to accomplish the task. Therefore the most likely result of this legislation will not be an increase in the number of the electrician jobs available, but merely the reduction of journeyman positions as they

are replaced with apprentice positions. This, we believe, is the true goal of the backers of this legislation – to further erode wages and benefits for workers in the electric construction industry.

Moving from a 1:1 ratio to a 1:3 ratio will negatively impact workplace safety and training, and will have the eventual consequence of lowering the skill-level and compensation of Michigan construction electricians. If the committee feels that it must move forward with a change, we would recommend shifting to a 1:2 ratio as a compromise. The residential construction industry already operates with a 1:2 ratio, so there is precedent for this arrangement. Even though commercial and industrial construction tends to be more complex (and more dangerous), making the 1:2 ratio uniform in Michigan would still be preferable to moving all the way to 1:3.

We are grateful for the opportunity to speak to you this morning, and are happy to answer any questions you might have.