

TESTIMONY

OF

RICK BLOOMINGDALE, PRESIDENT

THE PENNSYLVANIA AFL-CIO

ON

THE STATE LICENSURE BILL FOR PLUMBERS

BEFORE THE

HOUSE PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 11, 2016

**Richard W. Bloomingdale, President**

**Frank Snyder, Secretary-Treasurer**

**Pennsylvania AFL-CIO**

**600 North Second Street**

**Harrisburg, PA 17101**

Good morning Chairperson Harhart, Chairman Readshaw, and members of the House Professional Licensure Committee. My name is Rick Bloomingdale. I am the President of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, and I am here today on behalf of the affiliated labor organizations representing over 800,000 hardworking women and men.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding House Bill 1357, the State Licensure Bill for Plumbers. Pennsylvania is one of only six states in the country that currently does not have a state license for plumbers. Each of the states bordering Pennsylvania has a state license. Because our state does not have a state license or any other consistent method of licensing plumbers, Pennsylvania contractors cannot cross state lines into the sister states to bid or secure work on projects in these states. It is very difficult for Pennsylvania contractors to qualify and test in these states. Conversely, most municipalities and townships in Pennsylvania recognize and grant licenses to contractors from the surrounding states with the knowledge that the person has to meet all the requirements for their state's licensing structure. So a key component of this legislation is *reciprocity*. This legislation would put Pennsylvania contractors on a more nearly level playing field and give the Commonwealth a mechanism to deny out-of-state contractors the access in Pennsylvania if their home state does not offer the same benefit to Pennsylvania contractors.

The protection of current jobs and revenue streams is very important to the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, and we trust that this legislation in no way jeopardizes them. We certainly don't envision this bill as jeopardizing current plumbers' jobs. This is because a very liberal grandfather section is contained in HB 1357. Persons currently installing plumbing in most cases will receive a license without testing. This legislation would not disrupt or change any existing practices of work, jurisdiction, or job assignments. It would not disrupt or change any existing practices of job or work permitting. If a task currently does not require a plumbing permit, the requirements would not change under this legislation. To be clear, HB 1357 deals only with who is legally permitted to call themselves and advertise themselves as licensed plumbers. This concept is supported by the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO.

There are some noteworthy economic aspects to HB 1357. Many companies spend thousands upon thousands of dollars on an annual basis to purchase licenses in each and every township, borough and county in which they do any kind of work. Under this legislation one would pay for one license that would be recognized state-wide. This would be a significant cost savings to the contractor, consumer, and end user. If passed, this would potentially generate millions of dollars annually for Pennsylvania in licensing fees. However, we need to ensure that these fees are shared with local governments that may lose fees as a result of

this act and that these fees are used to hire inspectors to guarantee the safety of affected work sites.

Home Improvement Contract [HIC] registration within the State Attorney General's Office is improved under this bill. An additional layer of protection for all consumers would be added. Consumers would have the ability to verify by way of a state website if a person is licensed and qualified to provide the services they are offering. It would stop the dangerous practice by some townships and boroughs of issuing permits to persons with an HIC number and not a trade specific license. This practice exposes the consumer to great economic, health and safety risk. Indeed, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania a person is required to have a state license to cut, style or braid hair, for example. But in the plumbers' trade, although piping systems can be done incorrectly and end up putting the health of many people in jeopardy, in Pennsylvania, there is no regulation. This legislation will help to ensure that the rights, health, safety, and economic well-being of all citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are protected.

The plumbing industry across the state has worked for over ten years to obtain a consistent method for the licensing of plumbers. The universal motto of the Plumbing Industry worldwide is and has always been "The Plumber Protects The Health Of The Nation." Plumbers, as professionals in their craft feel the same sense of duty to protect the public and the environment as do our elected officials.

I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you.