



Independent Electrical  
Contractors

## Central Pennsylvania Chapter Independent Electrical Contractors

### Testimony of Bruce Seilhammer Electrical Construction and Service Group Manager, SECCO, Inc. before the House Labor & Industry Committee

Room 60, Capitol East Wing  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania  
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Chairman Cox, Chairman Harkins, and members of the House Labor & Industry Committee thank you for allowing me to join you this morning.

My name is Bruce Seilhammer, I am currently the Electrical Construction Group Manager at SECCO, Inc in Camp Hill. SECCO has been in business here in Central PA since 1969. I have served in the US Air Force and I have been in the electrical industry for over 36 years. Part of my position, over the last 26 years, at SECCO is the constant growth of our company through talent recruiting and retention.

I am here today representing the three regional chapters of the IEC (Independent Electrical Contractors) of Pennsylvania. Together these Chapters represent about 75 contractor and associate members throughout the state that employ nearly 4,000 voters here in Pennsylvania. SECCO was one of the founding members of the Central Pennsylvania chapter. We are a volunteer-led membership association that represents merit shop electrical contractors, suppliers, and industry professionals. I have served on multiple IEC committees, and have held all local board positions within our chapter. I have also served at the national level on the Executive Board, fulfilling the position as the National President in 2017.

I have seen first-hand the needs of manpower for contractors not only in Pennsylvania, but across the country. We are lucky enough currently to be a part of a vibrant growing economy, and we would have an opportunity to put even more people to work if some of the restraints are lifted to allow us to do it.

**Workforce Development is critical to Apprenticeship.** Governor Wolf, President Trump, and leaders from both sides of the aisle have illustrated the need for more development of apprenticeships of all types and continued growth of skilled trades. The United States Department of Labor (USDOL) projects severe worker shortages will continue to increase in the U.S. for electrical helpers and electricians over the next seven years. We need these skilled workers in construction, true, but we also need them working on staffs in our schools, hospitals, and state buildings throughout the Commonwealth. That is why apprenticeship programs like ABC's and IEC's are critical in training new talent and improving the ratio quotient.

The shortage and need for skilled electricians allow for faster than average job growth in our field (10-14%) and continued wage increases for the industry on average. Development of apprentices into the skilled labor pool is critical to the continued success of our nation. We need these apprentices to have the opportunity to work one on one with a skilled journeyman to grow their knowledge and work to become a journeyman themselves.

***Why would an individual want to be an apprentice?*** It can be difficult to work full-time, take classes after work, and complete homework in between. Apprenticeship is not a 6-month or 18-month training with tuition between \$18,000 and \$34,000. It is a comprehensive 4-year program. For those who make the commitment, their success is significant. They will have been gainfully employed, developed electrical knowledge, skills and techniques that qualify them as journeymen, and not an entry-level worker. They will have diversified experiences that allow them to work in residential, commercial, and industrial settings. During those 4 years, they will have guaranteed pay increases that take someone with no experience from a starting wage to a wage that will nearly double by time of completion. Apprentices will not incur student loan debt. In fact, in the IEC program, graduating apprentices will have completed 41 college credits which is over half of an Associate's Degree, paid for entirely by their employer.

When an individual completes an apprenticeship, they are awarded a Pennsylvania Certificate of Completion that recognizes them as a journeyman. For many IEC graduates, this is just the first step in a long-term career filled with additional education, promotions, and in some cases, even the decision to start their own business. Some may get licensed as journey, or master electricians in those areas that require it. Or, they may decide to journey beyond the Pennsylvania borders and use their apprenticeship completion as the basis for mandatory licensing in other states.

***What are the regulations that apply to apprenticeship?***

In 1961 the Pennsylvania Apprenticeship and Training Act was enacted. It created the Pennsylvania Apprenticeship and Training Council of eleven members to be appointed by the Governor and defined their powers and duties. Regulations related to the Act were most recently updated in 1997. These regulations include a definition that non-joint apprenticeship programs should have 4 journeymen supervising a single apprentice, and that a second apprentice may only be added to the jobsite when 5-9 journeymen are on-site. Programs that are connected to a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) are allowed to use a ratio that is specified in the CBA and it is not necessarily disclosed to the US DOL, nor the Pennsylvania Apprenticeship and Training Council.

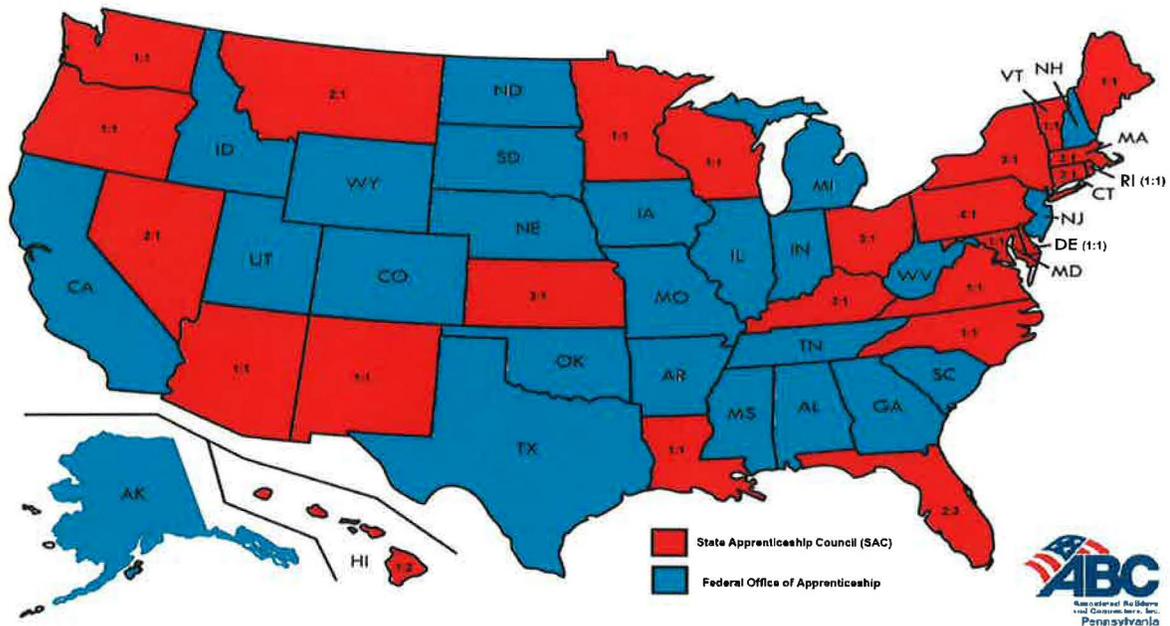
The Federal Standards for the Registration of Apprenticeship were completely updated in October 2008. These new standards include regulations regarding the recognition/de-recognition of state approving agencies. They gave a two-year period for states to make plans and take action for compliance with the new federal regulations to date, Pennsylvania is yet to comply. The Apprenticeship and Training Council is still acting as an approving body instead of an advisor to the director of the department. Meetings of the Council typically spend the majority of the time voting on new programs or adding new occupations to existing programs but rarely is there activity or business to promote the improvement and positive promotion of apprenticeships. As one Council member noted, one meeting spent all of nine minutes voting on programs. However, if it is a construction program that is not part of a collective bargaining agreement, the approval process seems to spark debate, questions of whether apprentices are being paid correctly, questions about the sufficiency of their safety training, and extra scrutiny in general. In fact, some past meetings of the Council involved proceedings and questions merely for the purpose of delaying program approvals. As for the safety of apprentices working with merit shop companies, my colleague,

Mr. Brubaker, and ABC Keystone have provided you with information on the negligible differences between joint and merit shop companies and the data from OSHA on incident rates clearly shows that states who adhere to the federal standard fare better than those run by individual states and all of those states have a lower ratio than Pennsylvania.

***How does Pennsylvania compare to other states?***

One of the strongest state apprenticeship approving agencies is our neighbor, Maryland. With their own state administration and staff, they have implemented a state database system and will soon move to the RAPIDS database. They have a funding mechanism to support and promote apprenticeship that focuses on the significance of workforce development versus the construction prevailing wage laws. It should be noted that Maryland does not recognize Pennsylvania registered apprentices.

Sadly, Pennsylvania also lags behind many states in the ability to train more individuals as a result of restrictive apprenticeship ratios. By comparison, in twenty-four other states contacted, twelve of them allow a ratio of 1 journeyworker to 1 apprentice. Ten states allow a ratio of 1 journeyworker to 2 apprentices, and three states allow a ratio of 1 journeyworker to 3 apprentices. Pennsylvania has the most limiting ratio, and it prevents employers from hiring more people and continuing to grow. In 2012, multiple program sponsors submitted requests for ratio relief to the PA Apprenticeship & Training Council. None of the requests for the individual programs were approved. In September 2015, we submitted a written request to the Council Chairman to request a change in ratios for all programs in the state to 1:1 and our sister Chapter IEC Chesapeake submitted and was denied a 1:1 or 3:1 program modification in 2016. However, in November of 2019, a union program was presented and approved at 1:1 for lineman training.



***Where should we go from here?***

There are substantial opportunities for apprenticeship growth right now. Both state and federal government grants continue to be awarded for apprenticeship programs. Grants have been connected to apprenticeship program sponsors themselves, and not merely administrative structures. Gov. Wolf created and has begun to implement PA Smart to meet the economic needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We are at a crossroads in Pennsylvania. If we do nothing to modify our Apprenticeship Standards and Regulations, we will limit apprenticeship to only construction-related programs and continue to lose numbers of well-qualified workers. We know that student loan debt in the US has now surpassed credit card debt. Apprenticeship avoids significant student loan debt. From US DOL statistics, for every dollar spent on apprenticeship, employers get an average of \$1.47 back in increased productivity, reduced waste and greater front-line innovation.

We must decide if we are going to embrace and modernize apprenticeship in Pennsylvania, or if we will let these great training programs dwindle for lack of support. All of the submitted bills, while differing in approach, would move Pennsylvania forward whether through compliance with the 2008 federal apprenticeship regulations or by aiding businesses to provide additional opportunities through apprenticeship. Our goal as a commonwealth should be creating strong apprenticeship opportunities for true workforce development.