



Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee: My name is Michelle Burke and I am the President of the Ohio Marine Trades Association (OMTA). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of expanding workforce development initiatives in the marine trades industry.

According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Parks and Watercraft (2023), the economic impact of Ohio's boating industry in 2022 was a remarkable \$6.40 billion. This industry accounted for 45,856 jobs across our state. These numbers highlight a vibrant and economically significant sector—yet despite this growth, one of the most pressing challenges facing the marine industry is a shortage of skilled workers.

The Rhode Island Marine Trades Association (RIMTA) has noted in *A Marine Industry Guide to Growing the Workforce* that the industry continues to thrive, citing boat show successes, record-breaking sales, and strong profit margins. However, the demand for skilled labor is simply not being met. As a result, we are witnessing increasing wait times for both boat construction and service, which threatens to slow the very momentum the industry has worked hard to build.

To sustain and accelerate this growth, it is imperative that we invest in workforce development. This means actively recruiting high school graduates, entry-level workers, and individuals considering a career change. In Ohio, only 47% of the 2020 senior class enrolled in a two- or four-year college after high school, according to the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. This tells us that more than half of our young adults are open to alternative career paths—and the marine industry can be one of those options.

We must also focus on those entering the workforce for the first time or transitioning from other careers. These individuals are often eager to learn and can gain valuable skills through hands-on, on-the-job training that leads to long-term, rewarding employment.

Career opportunities in the marine trades range from entry-level to highly specialized. For example, a marine technician apprentice can start at \$15 per hour with no prior experience. With training and experience, that same individual can advance to a marine technician role earning at least \$24 per hour. At the highest level, a master marine technician with advanced certifications and experience can earn \$45 per hour or more—potentially exceeding \$100,000 annually (Ohio Marine Careers, 2024). This clear pathway to upward mobility and strong wages makes marine trades an attractive and viable option for Ohio workers.

In closing, I urge the committee to support the marine trades by supporting our amendment to help expand workforce development in this vital industry. With the proper investment, we can strengthen our economy, support Ohio families, and ensure that the marine industry continues to thrive for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Michelle Burke

President

Ohio Marine Trades Association