

Support SB 142

Good Morning Chairman Rulli and members of the committee. My name is Tony Caruso. I own, with the help of my family, a fifteen employee plumbing, heating, air conditioning and boiler hydronics company in Bedford Heights.

Currently, I hold professional licenses for the following skilled trades; plumbing, HVAC and Boiler Hydronics. I have been licensed in these disciplines for over thirty years. I served as a professional firefighter/paramedic for thirty three years reaching the rank of Lieutenant before retiring. I held a license for Ohio State Fire Inspector and as an Ohio State Fire Training Instructor until I retired from the fire service. I maintain teaching fire safety and accident prevention through various training programs. I teach and lecture boiler steam and hot water science at a Cleveland area trade school. I am a member of the Northeast Ohio Master Plumbing-Heating- Cooling Contractors and have served two terms as president and now hold the office of treasurer.

The Northeast Ohio Master Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors promote professional and ethical standards in our profession and teach the ways to a successful life in this business. We received education from manufacturers, accountants, business coaches, bankers and other financial advisors throughout the year. State licensing has been the key to my success. I have made it this far in my life with a limited education, but very streetwise, to sit before you now and describe proof positive that state licensing absolutely promotes added protection for our citizens that we are all sworn to protect. It also promotes craftsman to gain higher levels of competency and knowledge, and a much more respectable wage and job satisfaction for a lifetime rewarding career.

I am here today to offer my expertise of why it is time to pass this important piece of legislation, Senate Bill 142 will protect the health and safety of the citizens of Ohio. With my history in the fire service I can stand quite objectively and practically to the reasons state licensing is so necessary. During my Career in the fire service we conducted weekend inspections. On too many occasions we interacted with individuals making replacements of major heating, cooling, water heaters and performing water and sewer work that by state and local codes called for permits. Further investigations showed no permits were on hand and the individuals were unlicensed. I personally responded to emergency calls for water flow alarms, carbon monoxide alarms and/or ill occupants due to carbon monoxide in the air due to incorrectly installed appliances by individuals not licensed and again no permits

for the job. Today, I still see these scenarios play out in my business as a follow up responder.

The industry has become much more sophisticated in the appliances being installed for heating, cooling, hot water, etc. In recent years most suppliers will only sell these products to licensed professional tradesmen that have had previous training and are certified to do so. Training is usually free. With the ease of the internet, one can find these appliances through third party vendors and go around these safeguards. Manufacturers will not warrant these appliances acquired in this manner. It is simply too much liability. They cannot possibly know where these appliances came from; are they damaged, are they used, etc... This further exposes the consumer who is having this appliance installed. An obvious and deliberate lack of due diligence by the unlicensed individual. Licensed contractors are regularly trained by manufacturers, wholesalers and professional trade associations such as PHCC and ACCO. The manufacturer knows these systems are complex and training is needed. It is the way the industry has headed and will remain headed due to achieving levels of efficiency and controlling waste to the environment. You can make the best product in the world, but if it's not installed properly it will never function properly and may be dangerous, even lethal. For the manufacture and the wholesaler, liability is too great to sell to unlicensed individuals.

When we speak of unlicensed individuals we are speaking of installers that carry no level of liability insurance to protect the consumer, they carry no workers compensation insurance to protect themselves, their employees and again the consumer. They have no formalized training. They simply are not playing by the rules. Licensed professional contractors are mandated by the Ohio Construction Industry Licensing Board (OCILB) to carry a minimum of one million dollars of liability insurance. Yes, it costs more to have the professional level tradesman in your home or business but the savings comes from confidence that the work is done professionally and most important safely for the consumer. Too many times OCLIB is powerless to assist a consumer that is attempting to track down an unlicensed residential installer or repairman that will not return a consumer's call. When contacted by the consumer the board asks for the individual's name. It will not be found because they are unlicensed. This makes all the trades look bad as well as our system or check and balances to protect our citizens.

One of the best fail safe reasons for state licensing is that for specific installations or repairs a permit is necessary. Only a state licensed tradesman can obtain a permit for this specific work. With the permit comes an inspection by an inspector representing that jurisdiction the work is performed in. This is another set of eyes

to view the work and insure it is correct and safe. This individual is yet another advocate for the consumer generated by licensing. I try to stay current with building codes just like you all do your best to stay current with all the laws. But just like all the laws, there are a lot of building codes constantly changing. The relationship with inspectors also helps us learn and keep up with changing procedures in our industry. With that exchange with an inspector on a job site a potential problem is mitigated and the consumer is potentially kept out of any harm. Remember; no license...no permit. No inspection. In the fire service, I hated to be that bad guy. However, I had a more important duty to act to protect the people I work for. Who is policing the individuals working out of the trunks of their cars on Sunday? No one.

Plumbing, electrical, HVAC, refrigeration and boiler work should not be cost driven as the sole reason a consumer hires a contractor. Yes, it's an important part. However, consumers should expect that all tradesmen play on a level playing field. Minimally, the contractor should provide insurance and should meet the state minimum to protect the health, safety and wallet of the consumer. Our citizens, our customers need the advocacy of licensing and what it brings. They need to know that their dentist and their staff are all properly trained and have kept up with the standards of their profession just as barbers, cosmetologists, EMTs, realtors and pest control professionals are. This list goes on. This is only to have a degree of minimal standards to protect consumers.

If there was ever a greater incentive for state licensing, it is that it enables a person to not have to work in the shadows, dodging inspectors on weekends, and cashing checks in bars. A licensed individual learns through so many professional free help sources. He learns the benefits of declaring income and deductions to help build a legitimate business to work legitimately and to perform a profession that one can be proud of. Make no mistake, state licensing gets many skilled, but no business savvy tradesmen out of a rut. Once I became licensed, that license opened many opportunities to good paying projects that I could pursue. I could now work at job sights union or not, with other licensed tradesmen. Licensed contractors build endorsements that enable you to be placed on municipal registries as a licensed contractor in your discipline.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to speak about something that's been such a large part of my life's work. I strongly urge the passage of Senate Bill 142 and I am happy to answer any questions you might have of me.

Tony Caruso