

Kimberly Tobias
Manchester
LD 509

Good Afternoon Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Kimberly Tobias of Manchester and I'm a Journeyman Electrician with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1253. Today, I am testifying in opposition of LD 509.

My job as a journeyman is multi-faceted. In just the last 6 months my experiences have varied from lifting and installing solar panels; cutting, threading and bending conduit; installing lights from a lift 60 feet in the air; most recently I've been coordinating and completing cable pulls in an active paper mill rebuild. That involves making sure the 300-plus pound reel of cable is where we need it to be, that the apprentices understand where the cable is going, and if the device to be wired isn't installed yet, how much extra cable they need to leave to get to it. Then they need to climb.

Yesterday it was 20 feet up an extension ladder, to a beam, across pipes, other cable tray with live wires in it, and then pull themselves up another 5 feet into the cable tray we pull through. Keep in mind they're over areas others are working in. And that means I have to do a quick assessment to make sure their fall protection harness is fitted correctly, that they have no nails or metal sticking out of the bottom of their boots, and that they will have safe access to complete our tasks.

All of this happens with making sure the list of wire pulls is accurate, every wire is labeled, organized, and tested. And I'm not just doing the work, I am teaching every step of the way. Because at the end of the day the most important aspects of my job are that those apprentices go home without incident or injury, and that I am teaching them to do the job safely.

I've done my homework on the sponsors of this bill, and zero of them have ever held an electrical license in the state of Maine. To give a little background, Maine's community colleges and apprenticeship programs require that you have a helper or apprentice license as part of your education, which leads me to conclude that the sponsors also haven't taken any electrical education courses. Much of what is taught in the classroom the first year is electrical theory and calculations, so having classroom time isn't a magical ingredient that creates a safe and knowledgeable helper or apprentice.

What it comes down to is this: the lower the ratio, the safer we all are. Adding more helpers and apprentices to the equation does nothing but save a little money, while putting the workers and customer at risk.

A contractor or customer saving twenty to thirty dollars an hour isn't worth my life. I know my mother could never recover if she got the call that I was in a fatal workplace accident. And their savings is not worth the devastation and confusion my 3 year old would experience when he's told mommy won't be coming home anymore.

Give us the chance to continue teaching the right way. Unsafe electrical installations, at best trip a breaker, at worst something blows up or burns down. Please allow us to put the time and money into helpers and apprentices to get the education they deserve to keep all of us safe.

Thank you for your time.

In Solidarity,
Kimberly Tobias
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