

**Business Development
National Electrical Contractors Association
CT Labor Management Cooperation Committee**



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Veterans' Affairs Committee Public Hearing

Thursday, February 18, 2021

Testimony on

**HB 5732 AN ACT ESTABLISHING RECIPROCITY FOR CERTAIN LICENSES HELD
BY MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES.**

**SB 413 AN ACT EXEMPTING VETERANS FROM THE FEES FOR APPLICATION OR
RENEWAL OF OCCUPATIONAL LICENSES**

To Senator Cabrera and Representative Boyd, and Senator Cicarella and Representative Vail, thank you for listening to the input I am offering on behalf of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) regarding HB 5732 and SB 413.

Connecticut is lucky to have a 100-year-old partnership between the owners of electrical contracting firms and their workers, embodied in the Connecticut Labor Management Cooperation Fund where I am employed. My task is to help highlight this unique cooperation between labor and management, demonstrating its value to you and the public. Throughout our history, we have trained tens of thousands of licensed electricians to build the best buildings in America, right here in Connecticut, with no cost to the taxpayer! NECA and the IBEW help men and women gain a middleclass life, in a rigorous STEM trade.

Proposed bills 5732 and 413 have the noble intent to help our returning veterans. We support this and would point you to our longstanding program, offered for electricians and other trades, "Helmets to Hardhats." This special veteran outreach program will be assisted with the passage of Senator Osten's Proposed Bill 413, which will exempt veterans from the fees for application or renewal of occupational licenses.

The construction industry and its unions have served nearly 40,000 veterans through "Helmets to Hardhats" since it began in 2003. The IBEW and NECA help veterans become the safest, most highly skilled and productive construction craft workers in the world without costing the taxpayer a dime. We wish to continue doing so without reducing the comprehensive and necessary classroom time and on the job training that has served Connecticut so well.

While Representative Haines' Proposed Bill 5732 is equally noble in its intent, it may result in unintended consequences. Electricians have a difficult and dangerous task handling electricity which can range from 25 volts to 10s of thousands of volts. This dangerous trade requires

extensive training and expertise to keep the public, and our electrician neighbors, safe. You will be impressed to know that to become a fully journeyed electrician, you will have racked up more class instruction than is required to earn a master's degree and have 5 years of on-the-job training – longer than a doctor's residency. The intensity of the program ensures apprentices become not only skilled and adept, but also committed to a lifelong profession.

We believe veterans deserve our utmost respect and assistance as they return to the workforce, and our Helmets to Hardhats program described above is evidence of our commitment to that belief. However, the IBEW and NECA are concerned with a blanket approach to enabling reciprocal licensure for all veterans without consideration for the nuances of the trade or the varying differences in building and safety codes from state to state.

We value our many electricians who served our country, and we want the same level of training and education as any of our members. Some veterans may come from states with lower educational standards or may not even require electricians to be licensed or pass a licensing exam. Connecticut would not be wise to award a license to someone coming from such a state. Nor should someone who has received a license from a state with much less rigorous standards receive a license from Connecticut where more is required of electricians.

We testify here today that any veteran will be welcomed home by the members of the IBEW and will be trained in the best apprenticeship program and on-the-job training. As we have done for decades, we make sure that they are well trained and kept safe as they reintegrate back into civilian life and prepare them to sit for and pass Connecticut's licensure exam.

We support proposed bill 413 and urge that the good intentions in Proposed Bill 5732 be left to the existing apprentice training programs and Connecticut licensing that are serving us so well. If you know of veterans interested in the building trades from your districts, we would be happy to offer more details on the "Helmets to Hardhats" program should that be helpful.

Thank you.