

Support of SB 0302/HB 0840 Joint Committee on Workforce

My name is Elizabeth Comer, Secretary of the Catoctin Furnace Historical Society. I am writing in support of the 2020 Workforce Package and specifically SB 0302/HB 0840 Joint Committee on Workforce Development. Specifically, I want to encourage you to include historic building trades as an integral part of workforce training and apprenticeships leading to high wage, high skill jobs. Hands on skill development for renovation and restoration of historic structures (pre-World War II) such as plastering, plumbing, electrical work, masonry, roofing, window restoration, and woodcrafting are critically needed skills in the building industry. Introduction of these building techniques with investment comparable to college degree training at the high school level will provide young people with the opportunity to pursue them as a career. My knowledge of this need and its potential to change lives is the success of the Catoctin Furnace Historic Preservation Building Trades Initiative. This program can be replicated and expanded throughout Maryland.

Now in its eighth year, historic building trades are the centerpiece of our “Heritage at Work” program in conjunction with Silver Oak Academy, a residential boarding school for at-risk teens overseen by the State of Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. These students learn valuable construction skills working alongside preservation experts undertaking building rehabilitation and restoration. The program combines introductions to contemporary residential construction (necessary modern amenities such as electricity, plumbing, etc.) with a thorough grounding in early nineteenth century through mid-20th century house construction. Through demonstrations and site work, students are exposed to a broad range of construction methods, including preserving and uncovering architectural details and recreating documented design elements. Students develop an understanding of building components and systems and learn to compare current technology and traditional tools and practices.

The skills gained by the students help position them to work in well-paying and important jobs in their communities. It is of note that fully one third of the buildings in Baltimore City (the home of many Silver Oak Academy students) are located within a historic district and thus can take advantage of preservation tax credits for restoration. However, there is a shortage of skilled craftsmen to undertake all aspects of restoration on these historic structures. The historic preservation building trades program at Catoctin Furnace teaches students a love of history, materials, quality workmanship, and working with their hands to build, restore and preserve beautiful structures that are designed to last.

Utilizing our success in curriculum development, a state wide program can be replicated to provide hands on training in historic building trades. Such a program will teach time honored skills, ideas and values of fine craftsmanship through intensive hands-on training in historic building trades. Students would gain marketable high wage real world job skills that they can use to work in their community or begin their own business. Potential employers include contractors and institutions that specialize in preservation and conservation work, including historic millwork and interior finish carpentry. Job opportunities include diverse organizations and employers including: non-profit museums such as historic house museums, preservation societies, educational programs, custom restoration companies, the National Park Service, and

various private contractors throughout the United States. Graduates may also choose self-employment, specializing in preservation/restoration work.

Thank you for your consideration. I urge you to include historic building trades in SB 0302/HB 0840 Joint Committee on Workforce Development. At Catoctin Furnace, we believe that our historic building trades program is saving historic structures and saving young lives. With your help, students throughout Maryland can be afforded the same opportunity.