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Bill Number:	House Bill 650
Title:	Labor and Employment – Apprenticeship Standards – Ratio of Apprentices to Journeypersons
Committee:	Economic Matters
Hearing Date:	February 21, 2024
Position:	FAVORABLE

Employ Prince George's, Inc. ("EPG") is a nonprofit organization based in Prince George's County, Maryland. EPG serves as the Administrative and Fiscal Agent of the Prince George's County Local Workforce Development Board and is responsible for regulating policy development and the administration of workforce activities related to services and programs funded by the federal Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA). Under the leadership of EPG, the Prince George's County Local Workforce Development Area serves over 30,000 jobseekers and 4,000 businesses annually.

EPG is in strong support of House Bill 650. If enacted, this legislation would play a crucial role in advancing the ambitious goals set forth by the Apprenticeship 2030 Commission—namely, reaching 60,000 registered apprenticeships by the year 2030, as well as having 45% of high school graduates completing a registered apprenticeship by 2031. Without significant changes to the current landscape, we risk falling short of these targets.

Governor Moore has rightly emphasized the value of apprenticeships, making them a cornerstone of his administration's priorities. Yet, under the existing framework in Maryland, achieving these goals remains a daunting challenge.

Simply put, HB 650 would expand the current apprentice-to-journeyworker ratio from 1:1 to 3:1 across all non-hazardous apprenticeship occupations. While concerns have been raised regarding worker safety, it is important to note that this bill deliberately excludes traditional apprenticeship occupations, such as those within the construction trades, where such considerations are paramount. Instead, the focus is on generally non-hazardous occupations such as accounting, information technology, food service, marketing, retail, lodging, and healthcare.

One of the primary barriers to apprenticeship participation, particularly for small businesses, is the administrative burden involved. Navigating regulations, paperwork, registering apprentices with relevant bodies, and covering tuition costs all pose significant challenges. Unlike larger businesses and traditional apprenticeship employers, small enterprises lack the support systems provided by unions and robust human resources departments, making the process even more cumbersome. The current 1:1 ratio simply does not incentivize small businesses to engage in apprenticeships, rendering them impractical and unfeasible.

Moreover, the issue extends beyond mere administrative hurdles; it's also a matter of equity. Despite the availability of government funding for apprenticeship programs, these resources often fail to reach the small businesses that need them the most. By expanding the ratio, HB 650 would make apprenticeships a more viable option for small businesses, thereby promoting economic equity and opportunity.

Apprenticeships offer a compelling alternative to traditional higher education pathways. By earning a living wage from day one, apprentices can avoid the burden of student loan debt while acquiring valuable skills and qualifications sought after by employers. This is particularly significant for underserved communities, as apprenticeship programs actively recruit and support individuals from diverse backgrounds. By passing this bill, we can open more doors for women, minorities, and individuals with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive and equitable workforce.

In conclusion, HB 650 represents a critical step towards realizing the goals laid out by the Apprenticeship 2030 Commission. By expanding the apprentice-to-journeyworker ratio for non-hazardous apprenticeship occupations, we can empower small businesses, promote economic equity, and create pathways to success for individuals from all walks of life. Therefore, EPG respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 650.