

Public Hearing Transcript—General Law Committee  
March 5, 2002

**S.B. 501, AN ACT CONCERNING CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL  
EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ELECTRICIANS.**

REP. FOX: Thank you, sir. How about a Laurence Vallieres? Good afternoon.

LAURENCE VALLIERES: Good afternoon. Thank you Representative Fox and Senator Colapietro and members of the Committee for allowing me to appear before you today to testify on the S.B. 501, AN ACT CONCERNING CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ELECTRICIANS.

Once again, my name is Larry Vallieres and I am President of the Independent Electrical Contractors of New England, an association that represents allied industries in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island in the electrical field.

I also have the honor and privilege of serving at the pleasure of the Governor as the Chairman of the State Electrical Work Examining Board.

I realize we have a full agenda here today, so I'm going to try to speed this up for you as well.

I'm here, as I said, to testify in favor of S.B. 501, AN ACT CONCERNING CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ELECTRICIANS.

I respectfully ask for your support of this measure to require licensed electricians in Connecticut to participate in continued education.

This Bill would effectively ensure the highest standards possible for licensed electricians in Connecticut by establishing the continued education requirement and conditioning license renewal upon fulfillment of these requirements.

Consumer safety, code changes and quality assurance are three considerations that are addressed with this Bill.

Every three years our code, the National Electrical Code, is updated. Every three years there are approximately 1,000 changes that take place in that code. Some are relatively routine, nearly 300 of them are very important, and approximately 100 of them would be considered very critical.

It is our belief that Connecticut licensed electricians need to keep themselves abreast of current changes in the code so as to provide the same level of safety to the consumers of Connecticut that is delivered to those in many other states.

The rapid pace of technological advances in the field of electrical work is yet another reason to ensure that licensed electricians regularly update themselves on the newest developments and codes within our field.

Continued education for electricians is presently required in 67% of the 43 states that are requiring licensing for electricians.

Our neighboring states such as Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine all required continued education.

Continued education is long overdue for electricians and for the public safety. The state of Connecticut currently requires continued education for other professions such as real estate agents and pharmaceuticals.

We believe that it is imperative that we move forward and require continued education for electricians as well.

Electricity as everyone knows, can be a silent and unexpected killer. Electricity is unfortunately the cause of fires that have destroyed many buildings and homes and have taken many lives.

I will sum it up real quick. The Electrical Work Examining Board unanimously backs this measure and so indicated so by the unanimous vote at a November 2001 meeting. The Department of Consumer Protection is also supportive of this measure.

We believe that it is time for Connecticut to join the majority of other states in recognizing that continued education for electricians should require – be required to maintain the highest possible level of safety and service to the general public.

I respectfully respect – I respectfully request your support of this Bill and would be pleased to answer any questions should you have any.

REP. FOX: Thank you, sir.

LAURENCE VALLIERES: Thank you Representative Fox.

REP. FOX: Next speaker is a Robert Hupplesberg. Good afternoon.

ROBERT HUPPLESBERG: Chairman, members of the Committee. My name is Robert Hupplesberg, Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Plumbing, Heating, Cooling Contractors.

We are, as the Bill is now written, in opposition to it. If it could be revised to include plumbing and heating licenses we would be in full support of it and its intent.

I ask your permission to submit a statement from the plumbers and pipefitters Local 777. They are equally in support of this licensing for the plumbing licenses particularly.

Do I have your permission to submit their statement on that?

SEN. COLAPIETRO: Let me see if I've got this straight. You are opposing the Bill, but you like - they like it?

ROBERT HUPPLESBERG: They like it, except that it excludes plumbing and heating licenses.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: So if it included you, then you'd like the whole Bill?

ROBERT HUPPLESBERG: Absolutely.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: Go ahead.

ROBERT HUPPLESBERG: We would like to be - we would like to set up our own educational - continuing education program for the plumbing and heating industry.

We've been trying to get this kind of a Bill for several years. What we're saying is, so long as the Bill is here before you, rather than put us through the process of trying to come here one license at a time, allow us to get those two licenses.

Actually, I feel it should cover all trade licenses.

The Department of Consumer Protection prefers that it cover all trade licenses. And I can't speak for the others, but I can speak for plumbing and heating.

And if we could have that, we'd certainly appreciate it.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: All right. I understand - I understand what you're saying. But, I mean I don't necessary agree that you like it if you're included, but you don't like it - one step at a time is the way I look at it.

ROBERT HUPPLESBERG: I'd say we're in opposition to the Bill because it excludes us.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: I don't think it excludes you - it just includes one - I took the - I was the one that took just the electricians out of it because the way the DCP wanted it, why should a glazier, a guy putting windshields in or windows in, have to go to an ongoing educational thing? That's just one example.

ROBERT HUPPLESBERG: I can't speak to that.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: That's the reason I narrowed it down to one. Because I didn't hear from anybody. And I've been in here since 1993 and this is the first I've heard that you were interested in this.

ROBERT HUPPLESBERG: We approached you two years ago on it with Peter Buchay.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: (INAUDIBLE – MICROPHONE NOT ON) But, I hear what you're saying.

ROBERT HUPPLESBERG: All right. We ask that of you – to make that modification in the Bill. We would appreciate it if you would do it.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: Do you have language on that?

ROBERT HUPPLESBERG: No, we accept the language of the Bill that was accepted with one change – that it include plumbing and heating licenses. That's all.

We agree with the Bill – it's intent. We believe there should be continuing ed – our members almost unanimously believe that and they want to submit themselves to continuing ed because they think it's essential for maintaining standards in their own industry.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: Any questions?

REP FOX: Andrew Hul? Am I saying that right H-U-L?

ANDREW HUL: That's correct.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: Are you from a different organization that wants to be included and you don't like the Bill either?

ANDREW HUL: Well, some of what I'm going to say is a little redundant, but it lends to the point of wanting trade education.

My name is Andy Hul and I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I'd like to comment on 501. I'm the owner of Rapid Service. I'm a plumbing, electrical, heating company. We do it all. I'm also past President of the Connecticut Plumbing Heating & Cooling Contractors Association. I'm their Education Chairman. I hold four trade licenses here in the state of Connecticut. Some say I'm an over-achiever. And a registration for a state of Connecticut home improvement contractor.

I'm in favor of this Bill if you add plumbing, heating and other trades pertinent – that are pertinent that should be covered in continued licensing, continuing education.

The Local 777 – union local is in favor of a Bill that includes our trades. It's a very simple change in wording that we're asking for to include the plumbing and heating contractors in the Bill. And not just electricians.

I know Consumer Protection is in favor of this. Rich Hurlbert has been in favor of this. We work very hard with Consumer Protection to get these things done.

As it stands now, if this Bill passes the way it is, it's going to mean that we have to go through this process again and again to get plumbing in or heating or air conditioning or the HVAC industry into the Bill, or into law. So—

SEN. COLAPIETRO: If it passes the way it is, how does that affect your industry?

ANDREW HUL: Well, let's look at it from this point of view. I'm going to be sending one-third of my company to continuing ed and the other guys are going to be laughing at them saying, "ha, ha, you don't have to — you have to go get continuing ed — we don't — you know, we don't have to go".

Whereas, one of the comments made just a few minutes ago — code changes are ongoing. Every three years the state of Connecticut should be adopting a new code for the plumbing industry, if you don't keep on it, they won't know what the changes are.

One of our biggest gripes is we don't even know what the code changes are that are happening. We'll walk into a job and we'll put in piping in a certain way, and an inspector will say, "that's not good". And we'll say, "why not"?

SEN. COLAPIETRO: What are you doing now?

ANDREW HUL: There is no continuing ed for our trade.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: No, you said two would be going and three would be laughing at you?

ANDREW HUL: Well, right. My plumbing, electrical — I run a plumbing, electrical and heating company, so I have — most of my technicians hold a license in plumbing or heating or electrical. They're all separate, typically.

I happen to — you know, hold too many.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: I was just wondering what you were doing now — if you had that many — three out of five you say?

ANDREW HUL: I'm sorry?

SEN. COLAPIETRO: Three out of five are saying — they're laughing at the other two because they —

ANDREW HUL: Well, say if, for example, you pass the Bill as it stands now. All my electricians have to go to continuing ed while my plumbers will be looking at them going — you know, how come you have to go, or I don't have to go, or stuff like that.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: And nobody has to go now, right?

ANDREW HUL: No one has to go now. So, we're in favor of continuing ed in a big way. It's a great Bill, I'm thrilled that it's raised, I want you to include our trades.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: So, if we include it, you're for it?

ANDREW HUL: Absolutely.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: Representative Metz?

REP. METZ: Do you send any of your electricians or plumbers to continuing education now?

ANDREW HUL: Oh, absolutely. We have -- every Tuesday morning we have a morning meeting that deals with whatever OSHA requirements -- you know, general informational meetings.

REP. METZ: Which is done within your own company?

ANDREW HUL: Within our own company.

REP. METZ: Are you thinking that that would qualify under the statute?

ANDREW HUL: No, absolutely not.

REP. METZ: So, you don't send anyone out of your company for education?

ANDREW HUL: We do. We send them to training seminars, we send them to manufacturers training. Many of our techs are factory trained authorized technicians for (INAUDIBLE -- MICROPHONE NOT ON) pumps and A.S. Smith water heaters.

REP. METZ: Is it your feeling that that sort of training would qualify for an electrician if we passed this Bill, or would there have to be somewhat more organized qualifications and acceptable --

ANDREW HUL: I would think -- there are several states that are models for us that we've been in contact with that continuing ed that is sponsored through a central organization.

You have to go there six hours. You have to sit through the class and then you get your continuing ed credit.

REP. METZ: And is there no such continuing education in Connecticut for either electricians or plumbers?

ANDREW HUL: None.

REP. METZ: So, where are you going to send them?

ANDREW HUL: That would – the state of Connecticut – plumbing, heating and cooling contractors would be willing to form an approved – we are already a Connecticut education facility.

We would like to be part of that education process where we set up a format that's uniform throughout the State. You come, sit for a six hour class or an eight hour class, whatever continuing ed requirements are, and as long as you sit through the class, you have fulfilled your requirements.

And it would be really at no expense to the State. Actually, the State would probably earn money on it.

REP. METZ: Why doesn't the plumbing and cooling and whoever they are organizations set up continuing education on its own without our requiring it, if it's that good?

ANDREW HUL: Well, the fact of the matter is that you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.

The industry is such that if you don't have to do it, why would you want to?

REP. METZ: Well, by the same token, if we order people to do it and there's no facility to provide the training, where do they go?

ANDREW HUL: There can very easily be a facility. Texas has done it. Very quickly, very easily, they passed a Bill and within a year they were ready to have continuing ed through their plumbing, heating, cooling contractors association.

And I know that there's several states as was mentioned earlier, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts – they all have continuing ed.

REP. METZ: I'm not arguing that continuing ed is not a good idea. But, it seems to me that the two have to come at the same time.

You'd have to – we have to be able to determine that there's someone who's available within a reasonable distance to provide this training, before we start ordering people to submit to it.

ANDREW HUL: Well, if it's a cart before the horse question, I think that you obviously have to legislate the need for continuing ed and then implement it.

REP. METZ: What about the electricians? To your knowledge, do you know if there are courses available in continuing education for electricians either?

ANDREW HUL: No, there are none. They are not required.

REP. METZ: So, essentially, we'd be doing that for electricians with no courses available.

ANDREW HUL: Sure. It's an important thing that we get continuing ed. Codes change every three years – hundreds of changes and it'll help our industry and help protect the population.

REP. METZ: I'm not arguing your point. I think your point is very well taken.

It is something that should be done, but I would think that in most fields, the education is generated from within and then spread throughout the field through some regulation like this, rather than having a regulation that has everybody scrambling around trying to find a way to comply.

Sometimes, as we've tried to do that in the past with home inspectors, for example, there was no way they could receive the training in time to go to work the next month.

So, that would be my only concern with it. But your point about continuing education for complicated fields like plumbing and electrical work and heating installation is very well taken. I have no problem with that.

ANDREW HUL: I think it's a build it and they will come concept. If you get the legislation passed, it will very quickly – you know – education will be put in place.

And it's typically the model for most states. I mentioned Texas a couple of times. They are a role model for getting this done. Florida does it. The legislation had to pass first for the education and then the education process came into being. It was very – it was rather simple and seamless.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: Representative Johnston, any questions?

REP. JOHNSTON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I guess I'm kind of on the same thought frame as Representative Metz on some of my questions and why it doesn't happen in-house more so through whatever associations you belong to.

If you're saying it's important. If you're saying it's something that ought to happen because code is changing and yet, I guess what I'm hearing is you probably – the industry isn't doing it because a certain percentage won't do it unless their mandated to do it.

So, maybe some of those who want to do it aren't going to pay that amount to do it in-house.

It seems to me that if you did – if it was so important – those that sent their own people to some type of continuing ed would become the rising stars and would be better at what they do and due to a better product, would probably have less projects that would fail

inspection and have to be redone and there would be just inherent natural savings that would incur.

But, yet we're going to have to mandate it. I guess that's what I'm trying to struggle with to understand.

ANDREW HUL: I think that one way to look at it is – would you want somebody in your home who didn't receive continuing ed on a product or a process that was being installed?

There's going to be resistance at some level if you stop and think about it no matter what you do for a living.

People have their sheepskin, they don't go to school anymore. Once you get your B.S. or your B.A. you're not going to go to college anymore to get an M.B.A. unless you have to, unless it advances you.

Once you have an electrical license, you're ready to work on a nuclear power plant. I can do piping and heating in just about any facility that you can imagine.

But if I'm not educated on a continual basis and if I'm not given an opportunity, or if I'm not encouraged to – you know, that's the way grandpa did it, you know. How do you put that in? Well, that's the way my daddy showed me how to do it.

There are a lot of tradesmen out there who look at life that way, you know. I've got my – my license and I'm done.

We want to make sure that these guys are educated. You know, we want to raise the standard of our trade.

We want to make sure that they maintain the best knowledge that they possibly can in order to protect the lives of people that they're working for.

And some people have to get dragged kicking and screaming to – to this event. But I think it's important for the consumer.

If you don't – if you don't – put the legislation there and say, well, and it's been done time and time again, we've got a legislation in place and now we have to figure out how to do it.

You know, a few years back we had legislation that passed a 1.6 gallon flush per fixture on a plumbing toilet. The technology wasn't there. The manufacturers couldn't figure out how to flush a toilet with 1.6 gallons in a residential house.

But, by God, by the time they were done they figured it out and now it's our – it's a concept that's working rather well.

At first, you know, you were flushing toilets two and three times when they first came out with the legislation. Because the legislation mandated that they do this. And they didn't have the technology.

SEN. COLAPIETRO: Let me ask you a question. I have a problem and I know a lot of other legislators do the same. If you have to do something, how long would it take you to get ready, and could we put that in legislation saying that you have such and such a date to get to comply?

You know, I don't believe in telling you you've got to be ready tomorrow to start these classes, you know.

ANDY HUL: Well, we're looking at next year. You're -- you know -- I think -- I believe written in here is for 2000 and --

SEN. COLAPIETRO: That's just for the electrical and they've already got it in place. They're all ready because they're already doing it.

ANDY HUL: Plumbing and heating would be very easy to put in place. There are -- as I said, model states -- Texas, Florida, all the New England states have this information.

It would be cut and paste and put it together and use their information. It's very simple.

REP. JOHNSTON: I don't want to belabor the point, Mr. Chairman. Just one quick follow-up.

Before we end up voting on this Bill, if there's information out there that those states that have the continuing education requirements, if there's evidence out there that there are less code violations from new work done and some sort of evidence that this is indeed improving their product, it would be helpful to me as I look at this issue.

I don't know if that's available, but if it is and you have it or you see it and you want to forward it to members, I think it would help us in our deliberations.

ANDREW HUL: I would think that that could be done. I'm doing everything I can to encourage the passing of this Bill as a tradesman, as a business owner.

It costs me money. It's going to cost all my men money. But it's the best thing to raise the professionalism of our trade.