



Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Bill 288: Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021

May 25, 2021

Ontario Construction Careers Alliance



On behalf of our members, the Ontario Construction Careers Alliance (OCCA) is pleased to provide a written submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs in support of Bill 288: *Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act 2021*.

Supported by several prominent Ontario construction associations and our labour union partner, OCCA is a non-profit, industry-funded alliance with a mandate to advance knowledge of careers in construction and associated professional vocations in Ontario schools. OCCA provides valuable information, research studies, and accessible resources to help students gain employment in construction. We also support the outreach activities of a dedicated OCCA Coordinator who conducts approximately 150 classroom and job fair presentations in high schools across the province, complete with virtual reality simulators that give students interested in the trades a chance to experience the trades in action on construction sites.

The construction sector remains one of the province's largest employers at over 500,000 workers and is a significant contributor to Ontario's gross domestic product. However, with the acute need for more housing and with public infrastructure investment in areas such as health, utilities and transportation on the rise for the foreseeable future, a large number of skilled workers will be needed to address a generational shift that is occurring in the construction sector. It is estimated that a further 100,000 workers will be needed to keep pace with the expected demand growth over the next decade and to replace the over 86,000 workers expected to retire (Buildforce, Ontario Report 2020).

Through the work of the OCCA, we are mindful of two hurdles that need to be overcome when it comes to recruiting more skilled workers, and which we believe aspects of Bill 288 will help address. The first is a problem of changing the stigma around careers in the trades. There exists a long-held public perception that a career in construction is for those who are unsuited for the academic rigours of college or university. Nothing could be further from the truth. Technological advancements and the necessity of detailed planning and coordination of materials, services and expertise, all undertaken in a complex and constantly changing construction site environment demand a highly skilled and dedicated workforce. Surveys have indicated that construction workers experience a high degree of job satisfaction, with well-paid positions that offer ingenuity, flexibility and excellent quality of life.

Through the activities of the OCCA we continue our efforts to overcome this stubbornly persistent stigma attached to the trades, and we are pleased to observe that perceptions are changing, albeit slowly. We think that a truly holistic effort is needed, with industry, labour groups and the government working together in order to accelerate this trend. We are encouraged by the student-focussed measures contained in the government's skilled trades strategy in the 2021 provincial budget. The proposed creation of a new entity under Bill 288, Skilled Trades Ontario, is another crucial step, especially if more emphasis is placed on trades and apprenticeship promotion.



Bill 288 also intends to make the apprenticeship system easier to navigate. The OCCA has heard numerous complaints that the system under the former Ontario College of Trades was confusing. A more streamlined one-window system with appropriate supports that serves as a robust information and intake portal would be of great benefit to prospective workers.

With knowledge of major changes to the construction workforce on the horizon, the OCCA and partner organizations are working steadily to increase awareness of careers in the skilled trades and the positive benefits associated with them. We strongly support the creation of the proposed Skilled Trades Ontario under Bill 288, with its proposed measures of streamlined access and enhanced promotional benefits, and we further believe that it is an important step in the government's continued skilled trades outreach.

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment, and we look forward to further discussion opportunities regarding careers in construction. Please do not hesitate to contact Andrew Hurd, OCCA Treasurer, at andrew.hurd@orba.org if you have any questions or concerns.

Ontario Construction Careers Alliance Members:

- Heavy Construction Association of Toronto
- LIUNA Canadian Tri-Fund (Labourers' International Union of North America)
- Ontario Road Builders' Association
- Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association
- Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association
- Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario
- Residential Construction Council of Ontario
- Toronto Area Road Builders' Association