

COCA Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

May 2021

Council of Ontario Construction Associations

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Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

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COCA Submissions

Introduction

- Chair, thank you for this opportunity to appear before your Committee today to provide our thinking with regard to Bill 288 Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021
- My name is Ian Cunningham, and I am the President of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations otherwise known as COCA
- With me today is Steve Dietrich, the Immediate Past Chair of the Board of Directors of COCA, the Chair of COCA's Skilled Trades Task Force and Vice President of AGF Rebar

About COCA

- For those of you who don't know COCA, we are a federation of 29 construction employer associations, and we serve as the voice at Queen's Park for approximately 10,000 general and trade contractors who employ hundreds of thousands of workers, both unionized and non-union performing work in the ICI sector all across Ontario and who hire and train thousands of apprentices

General Support for Bill 288

- We applaud the government for moving forward with Bill 288 and the creation of a new skilled trades and apprenticeship system to succeed the current one that is overseen jointly by the Ontario College of Trades and the Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development

Construction in Ontario

- As members of this Committee will know, Construction is at the very foundation of Ontario's society and economy
- Our industry builds the places where people live work and play and the transportation networks that take them there

Need for an Effective Skilled Trades System

- You have heard from previous witnesses about the shortage of skilled tradespeople that already exists in some construction trades and is forecast in many others in the months and years ahead
- So, if we are going to enjoy a strong recovery from the pandemic induced recession and continued growth and prosperity thereafter, it is imperative that we have a strong and healthy construction industry
- And a strong and healthy construction industry must be supported by a properly functioning skilled trades and apprenticeship system

Features of an Effective Skilled Trades System

- So, what does a properly functioning skilled trades and apprenticeship system look like:
 - a. It ensures that the industry enjoys a positive and respected public image
 - b. It offers professional careers in the skilled trades with opportunities for growth for those who want it
 - c. It makes career exploration in the trades easy and accessible
 - d. It makes applying for an apprenticeship as easy as applying for college or university
 - e. It offers modern, up-to-date apprenticeship curricula, aligned with the way the trades operate today
 - f. It actively engages the industry, (that is apprentices, journeypersons, supervisors and management) in all of its important decision making
 - g. It ensures that there are many construction employers who are eager and willing to hire apprentices
 - h. It provides supports, financial and otherwise, for apprentices and for employer-sponsors
 - i. It makes sure that apprenticeship completion rates are high
 - j. Journeypersons are proud of their chosen professions; they appreciate the benefit they receive from the license fees they pay into the system and they remain in their chosen trades for years
 - k. It has a fair and just process for the prescription and de-prescription of trades and for classification and re-classification of trades

- l. It has a fair and efficient process to evaluate the credentials of those trained in a trade in another jurisdiction
- m. As much as possible and wherever appropriate, the services provided by the system are accessible online
- These are just some of the qualities and characteristics that must be incorporated into the new system proposed in Bill 288 as it is stood up, should this Bill be passed into law

OCoT Two-Point-O

- Those on the Committee who have been around for a while will know how the introduction of the Ontario College of Trades into the system tore the construction industry apart
- The conflict over OCoT had a devastating effect on COCA with half of our members pro-OCOT and half against, even though COCA remained neutral in the debate
- However, the heated debate subsided when certain reforms were made that:
 - a. changed the Board of Governors from a 21 member, highly representative Board to a five-member competency-based board,
 - b. cut fees in half for journeypersons and eliminated them for apprentices; and
 - c. introduced a new compliance and enforcement policy that had a heavy emphasis on compliance assistance
- This reformed system was referred to by many as OCoT 2.0 and it turned out to be one that most stakeholders, including COCA, could accept and live with

The Proposed System

- The system proposed in Bill 288, while not exactly what COCA advanced in its submissions to the Michael Sherrard Expert Panel on the Skilled Trades, retains many of the elements that were working in OCoT 2.0 and had broad acceptance across our industry
- It will operate under the joint stewardship of both the Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development and a new external agency called Skilled Trades Ontario or STO for short, with a clear separation between training & certification under the aegis of STO and compliance & enforcement under the purview of MLTSD.
- STO will be governed by a board of directors of not more than 11 people including the chair. Board members will be selected based on their governance competencies that

are aligned with the legislative objectives of STO and appointed by the Minister. The Minister will also appoint a Registrar & CEO to lead the new Crown agency's operations.

- As already stated, this is a compromise system design that all stakeholders can live with, even if it doesn't check all their boxes

Two Conditions

- However, we have two provisos:
 1. That all construction trades in the current system must be transitioned into the new system exactly as they currently exist, with their full scopes of practice and classified as compulsory or non-compulsory, exactly as they are now; and
 2. That there is absolutely no opportunity for portable skill sets to be allowed into the construction trades

Closing

While much heavy lifting is yet to be done to stand this new system up, we look forward working collaboratively with the MLTSD and other stakeholders, including our friends at the Skilled Trades Alliance and the OGCA, in this important work

These are our submissions respectfully submitted.

Sincerely



Ian Cunningham
President