

Goodafternoon Committee members:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 45, the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications System Reform (2014) Act.

Over the past 18 months and several years prior, Merit Nova Scotia has been involved in an industry-wide consultation process overseeing changes to Nova Scotia's apprenticeship system. Bill 45 is the culmination of hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of hard work from staff at the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, previous Ministers Marilyn More and Frank Corbett, opposition parties, industry representatives, both union and non-union, and now the current

government through Deputy Minister Sandra McKenzie, Minister Kelly Regan and Premier McNeil.

The process was not easy, but we got it done. So why is the passage of Bill 45 necessary?

Over the next decade, Nova Scotia will need to fill 7,000 construction jobs.

Nova Scotia must accomplish this with the highest percentage of seniors in the country (16.8 per cent) and a net international migration of only 122 immigrants as of July 2013.

Interprovincial net migration of people is also a concern. For 11 of the last 15 years when net interprovincial migration has been negative, it has been negative in 14 years for the 15-19 age group; and it has always been negative for the 20-29 age group. We need to get younger, stronger and better trained.

The only way to buck this trend is to create an abundance of opportunities in apprenticeship-related fields. Nova Scotia's new apprenticeship agency is positively aligned in that direction because it creates mobility in the system and empowers employers by ensuring their voices will be heard by government. As the saying goes, "If you build it, they will come."



As I said, the new Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency is a model that finally puts industry first. But what does that actually mean?

It means:

- 1) A better equipped, more strategically aligned Community College. We need our Community College to be functioning at its highest capacity and efficiency to meet the demands of employers who yearn for quality trained tradespeople. Without the community college doing what it does best, I am afraid we are nothing more than a rudderless ship. Along with the 80 per cent of employers investing in apprenticeship, the Community College is our backbone – we need them!

2)Agreements with apprenticeship programs and systems in other provinces will allow apprentices to track their hours more efficiently and make their journey home more accessible.

3)Trade Advisory Committees will ultimately drive policy from the ground up. Last year, Merit backed off its position on changing apprentice ratios across the board because we understood the inherent value of allowing Trade Advisory Committees to do their job. We put our trust in the new governance model and decided to let industry determine the need for ratio and other policy changes that better reflect real-time economic needs.

Committee members, today is a good day for apprenticeship. I ask you to remember the first time your mother or father gave you the wheel and told you to drive the family car. It is a big responsibility – and government, which means everyone in this room, is giving that responsibility to industry. It's now up to us to make sure we don't crash the family car. Let's work together, and as Don Bureaux, president of the community college, once said to me, "the real work starts now." So let's not just build right; let's build together.

Thank you.