



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

TOM LARSON

Testimony on Assembly Bill 190 December 10, 2015

Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of Assembly Bill 190, which the Assembly passed in October on a voice vote.

Last session, the Legislature passed 2013 Act 143, which included, among other things, language exempting electricians who satisfy certain age and experience criteria from having to be licensed as a master or journeyman electrician or enrolled as a registered (formerly called beginning) electrician. A “grandfathered” electrician would instead receive an alternative license. The main purpose for this exemption was to allow qualifying electricians to continue to work without having to take the licensing exam, which can be a challenge, especially when you have not taken a test in years.

My personal preference would have been to allow no grandfathering at all, but the inclusion of this exemption was necessary in order to get Act 143 passed so that the overall electrician licensing program could finally take effect. However it was always my expectation that the Department of Safety and Professional Services would use its rulemaking power to impose the same requirements on grandfathered electricians as it does on other electrical licenses, including renewal periods and – most importantly – continuing education. If you are an electrician, it is essential that you keep current on developments in the trade, including updates to the National Electrical Code. Otherwise, your work may be an accident waiting to happen, and the results can be deadly.

I was disappointed with the rules DSPS ultimately produced, as were many stakeholders with whom I had worked on Act 143. The rules recognize “registered master electricians” – not to be confused with licensed master electricians – and grant them the authority to do the same work as licensed masters. However “registered masters” are only required to pay a one-time fee, and their registration is good forever; the rules also do not require them to take continuing education. By offering a cheap, lifetime credential with no obligation to take continuing education courses, these rules create an incentive for qualifying electricians, including those who are currently licensed, to switch over to “registered masters”. I think that is a bad idea, even though I myself would qualify.

AB 190 spells out what I had intended all along. Under the bill, grandfathered electricians will have to renew their license every four years, just like licensed master electricians, and they will be subject to the same renewal fees and continuing education requirements as licensed masters. In addition, AB 190 will close the door on new applications for grandfather licenses. I expect that any electrician who qualified for the exemption and wished to apply for it has already done so. I would also like to think that many more electricians who qualify for the exemption



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recognize the value of going through the process of earning an actual license – including taking the exam – and doing what is necessary to maintain it.

AB 190 also requires licensed or registered electricians to satisfy continuing education requirements established by DSPS. They are already required to do so by rule, but the statutes are largely silent about continuing education requirements for electricians, and I thought it was important to make the requirement statutory.

Thank you for your consideration. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.



Alliance for Regulatory Coordination

Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 190

Before the Senate Committee on Labor and Government Reform

December 10, 2015

Greetings!

I am Bob DuPont, founder of the Alliance for Regulatory Coordination.

The ARC is a consortium of 15 business, professional, and trade organizations involved in building design, construction and regulatory services. The Alliance seeks regulatory services provided in the most efficient manner possible to effectively promote the health, safety and welfare of Wisconsin citizens and visitors.

The Alliance for Regulatory Coordination supports Assembly Bill 190. We support continuing education as a method of promoting electrical safety because it helps electricians stay informed about advances in technology, construction methods, code requirements and state law.

We believe Assembly Bill 190 reflects what most interested parties expected as the outcome of 2013 Wisconsin Act 143, the original electrician grandfathering legislation. AB 190 will promote safety in a more balanced manner than the way current law has been implemented. It recognizes grandfathering of experienced electricians, but also recognizes the need for all electricians to obtain continuing education in order to better promote safety related to electrical systems and the use of electricity.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Please see reverse side for list of Alliance members.



Alliance for Regulatory Coordination

Classic Members

Associated Builders and Contractors of Wisconsin

International Association of Electrical Inspectors, Wisconsin Chapter

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Wisconsin State Conference

National Electrical Contractors Association, Wisconsin Chapter

Plumbers Union Local 75

Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors, Wisconsin Association

Water Quality Association of Wisconsin

Wisconsin Code Officials Alliance

Wisconsin Electrical Trades Council

Wisconsin Fire Protection Coalition

Wisconsin State Fire Chief's Association

Wisconsin State Fire Inspectors Association

Associate Members

Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin

Wisconsin Propane Gas Association

Supporting Members

International Code Council

AB 190 Public Hearing Comment
December 10, 2015
Testimony by: Bill Neitzel

First, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak regarding AB 190. My name is Bill Neitzel and I would like to share why I feel qualified to speak about different aspects of AB 190. I started as an electrician for my father in 1967. I worked for him until 1979 when I started my own electrical business in my hometown of Colby in central Wisconsin. Although there was no requirement at the time, in 1986 I took and passed the State of Wisconsin Electrical Master Certification Exam. I have paid for the renewal of my certification and licensing since that time. Needless to say, I have also obtained all of the required CEUs required to maintain my "Masters" status. In 1989 I began employment at the City of Madison as an Electrical and Heating Inspector and am still employed by the City. For the last seven years I have been a part time instructor for Madison College teaching exam prep, residential wiring classes and assorted continuing education classes. I am a Past President and currently the Education Chairman for the Wisconsin Chapter of the International Association of Electrical Inspectors. I have developed or refined over 40 electrical programs for continuing education. As an employee of the City of Madison, for the past 20 plus years, we have trained an average of 450 electricians per year. During the 1999 National Electrical Code Cycle as well as the current 2014 – 2017 National Electrical Code Cycle, I was voted chairman of the SPS 316 Electrical Code Advisory Council for the development of the State Electrical Code as it relates to the National Electrical Code. Needless to say, I have been proud to dedicate the last 48 years of my life to the Electrical Industry in the State of Wisconsin.

Based on my experience, I would like to address some concerns that came to light during discussions of why this public hearing was being held.

First of all, an issue that was presented was that of putting requirements on grandfathered electricians and the fear that it would put people out of business. My response to this would be "how many people have been put out of business since 1986 when Electricians were first exposed to State Electrical Certifications and Licensing and continuing education. I doubt that those who went out of business did so due to the costs associated with the implementation of licensing and continuing education. Instead, I believe that if you ask those who went out of business, they would indicate they went out of business due to financial failure from lack of work, lawsuits or health issues.

Another issue we heard was that the legislature added the "registered master electrician" exemption and meant for it to be this way. When the idea of licensing was first entertained in 2007, it passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 83 for, 14 against and passed the Senate 33 to 0. After several discussions with Representative Tom Larson who authored the bill, there was never an intention to allow exemptions. The unions and electrical associations around the State bought into the licensing issues going State-wide rather than being administered locally, because we were told there would be no "grandfathered" electricians. The State-wide licensing also took away the ability of the municipalities to be able to establish different categories of

electricians, so they would be limited to do the electrical work they are qualified to do. However, due to political pressure, exemptions were included in the 11th hour, but there was no direction to DSPS as to how the exemptions were to be handled. Therefore, these “registered master electricians” not only became exempt from passing the State Exam, they also became exempt from renewing their certification as well as any requirement to receive continuing education. By not having to renew their license, these “exempt” electricians have a financial advantage that “licensed” electricians are not entitled to. I question the logic of why someone who cannot or will not pass a State Exam would be permitted to be exempt from continuing education. How does such a person ever learn how to properly and safely install electrical equipment or get the information about product safety?

On a similar note, it was indicated that adding requirements to grandfathered electricians takes away the exemption. The exemption is to allow immunity from having to pass the exam. Not requiring continuing education is a safety concern. Are other professions required to receive continuing education? Of course, how else could they learn newer, safer, more efficient methods of doing their jobs? Having knowledgeable installers helps protect the citizens of the State of Wisconsin from unsafe installations that eventually will need to be redone due to safety concerns. Not only is this unsafe, but it creates an undo expense for the public.

As I understand, there are over 400 “registered master electricians” in the State of Wisconsin. Why do they get to be treated different than the more than 10,000 Wisconsin apprentice, registered, journeyman and master electricians who are under renewal cycles and continuing education requirements? Why are the properly licensed and registered electricians required to do more than those who can't or won't pass a State exam?

Another comment that surfaced was that if there are code violations, an inspection will catch it. As an electrician for over 20 years and as an inspector for the last 26 years, I will guarantee that inspections will not catch all code violations. An inspection is a snapshot in time of a project that indicates it is compliant when the inspector shows up. Things can and will change after the inspector leaves. The inspector does not always get called, and there are not enough inspectors and office staff to follow up on permits that have slow or delayed activity. I believe this is where my 48 years of experience can be of value. While contracting for over 20 years in central Wisconsin, I was never required to obtain a permit. I was inspected twice. Once on a school addition in the Colby School District and once in Rothschild Wisconsin while wiring an elderly housing apartment building. My father instilled my belief that if you are going to do a job, you do it to the best of your ability. Therefore, we were not concerned whether or not we would be inspected. In hind sight, I wish we would have had more inspections to ensure that our work was compliant and safe. Another set of eyes looking over installations is a real benefit to the citizens of the State of Wisconsin. Now that I work for the City of Madison, I cannot tell you how many projects I have been on that have had to be corrected. We started training electricians shortly after I started with the City of Madison. The improvement of the projects has been noticeable in the decline of failed projects seen each year. The major problems we see come from homeowners or unlicensed persons who allow owners to obtain the permits and “help out” with their projects, or contractors who obtain permits, but we never see any of our training

sessions. This sentiment is echoed by inspectors all over the State. Obtaining quality continuing education is imperative to having a competent electrical workforce.

We also heard that people just want to do what they know. They shouldn't be burdened with stuff they don't plan to work on. How do they know, with the changing technology, what they are going to work on? Our simplest systems are ever changing. With LED lighting and other electronics evolving at an astronomical rate, every electrician needs to have a constant supply of information to be able to determine what is safe to be installed. Workmanship and counterfeit products are the biggest problems facing electrical systems today. Electronics do not perform well with either of these problems and there is documentation by the Consumer Safety Products Commission, National Electrical Manufacturer's Association, National Fire Protection Agency, Underwriters Laboratory and other leaders in the electrical industry regarding these hazards. Training helps electricians to spot these problem areas and gives them the tools to work toward making safe installations. I have heard complaints from individuals that electrical safety products do not work, such as ground-fault protection and arc-fault protection which are designed to protect from electrical shock and fire. Those who are trained and knowledgeable do not seem to have a problem with these items working, as they have been trained on proper installation techniques and what to do to avoid these issues. I believe if those who complained had the proper training, they too would be able to install this equipment without issue.

There is a concern that if required to take continuing education classes, some will just watch the clock and do not want to waste their time on classes that do not pertain to them. They also worry about the cost and inconvenience of having to take continuing education. My response to this would be: are these the individuals we are going to cater to? Someone who is not interested in improving themselves or their knowledge because they are too lazy, too cheap or more interested in making money than providing public safety? Education is the only way to protect our citizens. If the \$50 per year to renew their certification (\$200 every four years) and the \$150 or less per year for continuing education is too much of a financial burden, these people really need to rethink their career choice. As I said earlier, how is this fair for the over 10,000 licensed electricians who are absorbing these costs and improving their personal value? The Wisconsin Chapter IAEI offers classes in all four quadrants of the State in the spring and fall, during a joint effort with DSPS. The most expensive of these classes has been less than \$120 for 6 CEUs (which is all that is required each year). Most Wisconsin Technical Colleges do or can offer electrical CEU classes for a very reasonable price. There are many other venues also available for a reasonable price. I find this to be a very pathetic argument against certification renewal and continuing education.

There was a comment made about reciprocity with other states. After talking with officials from Minnesota and Iowa, one of the stumbling blocks with allowing reciprocity with our Licensed Electricians being able to work in other states is the fact that the "registered Master Electrician" has never passed a competency exam. They feel there is no adequate way to determine the ability of these people and they do not employ the manpower to individually monitor these individuals. While on the reciprocity issue, it was also noted these other states want some sort of restriction on the number of online CEUs that are allowed. Currently

Wisconsin has no limitation. All of the required CEUs may be obtained online. Many online courses provide exams at the end of the program, but do not restrict the number of attempts before achieving a passing grade. Also, there is no way of tracking who is taking the test which could result in false results and an uneducated electrician. At least with face to face programs, even if the individual is not paying attention, you hope he/she would obtain something simply by being present. At the very least, they may gain knowledge through interaction with their peers.

At the very least, it is important that the AB 190 requires "registered master electricians" to renew their certification every four years and obtain a minimum of 6 hours of continuing education, just as other licensed electricians have. I feel that this is the least that could be done for the safety of the public as well as electricians themselves. Once again I thank you for your time and the opportunity to present my views at this public hearing.

Bill F. Neitzel
City of Madison Electrical/Heating Inspector
Wisconsin Chapter IAEE Education Chairman
Chairman SPS 316 Electrical Code Advisory Council 2014-2017
bfneitzel@gmail.com
(608) 347-8930