



December 15th, 2020

House Government Operations Committee Testimony: Jon Byrd – Michigan Laborers Union

- Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and good morning to the members of the committee. My name is Jon Byrd, and I'm the Director of External Affairs for the Michigan Laborers.
- I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you briefly today on behalf of the hardworking men and women of the Laborers Union in Michigan in support of Senate Bills 1215-1218, and more broadly in support of the construction of two new, state-of-the-art bridges in Bay City.
- In Michigan, we love our lakes, value our paychecks, and work hard at our jobs.
- The new bridges to replace the Independence and Liberty bridges in Bay City protects all three.
- With the state battling a global health pandemic, this project will strengthen the local infrastructure and economy.
- This is a unique building project, and today's legislation represents a unique opportunity for Democrats and Republicans to stand together.
- The Laborers International Union of North America, LIUNA, represents over half a million members in the United States and Canada primarily in the construction industry.
- Our affiliated Union in Michigan represents 13,000 hardworking skilled tradesmen and women which are organized into seven local unions throughout different regions in the state.
- We operate four state-of-the-art training facilities and pride ourselves on being one of the safest, most productive workforces in Michigan.
- We are excited to be a part of this critical infrastructure project and are hopeful that you all will thoughtfully consider passing this important legislation.
- The jobs that these bridges will create and sustain are not the usual seasonal tourist jobs that bring in minimum wage pay with no benefits. They are good paying jobs with benefits, and with plenty of opportunity for advancement. Jobs that are not just for men, but for women as well.
- Our members live in our local communities and spend their hard-earned dollars in local grocery stores, restaurants, paying their truck loans, and sometimes even in local drinking establishments.
- All of our members pride themselves on being the most productive and highly-skilled workers in the construction industry. Our members participate in extensive training through the Michigan Laborers Training and Apprenticeship Institute or MLTAI for short.

- Our Union through MLTAI is gearing-up over the opportunity to build Bay City these new bridges. Every year we train four to five thousand students in construction at our four training centers. In partnership with our signatory contractors, we raise over \$6 million dollars annually to provide state-of-the-art construction training facility to our Members.
- We also provide our Apprenticeship program at no cost to the apprentice and they are able to “earn while they learn.” Students are able to learn valuable skills from trained Journeymen while earning a weekly paycheck to support themselves and their families.
- We are also proud to be one of the only training programs in the State to have an in-house occupational health nurse within our staff, which has been such a blessing as we develop new protocols to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. We adapt and press on, no matter what challenges we face.
- Our Union and our members also pride themselves on being good community partners. We work hard to sponsor and volunteer at events for local non-profits, including the River Roar, the Bay Area Women’s Center “Love Shouldn’t Hurt” Hockey game, Habitat for Humanity, Various concerts, and the United Way.
- Many of us take our infrastructure for granted. For years, our community has worked to come up with a solution to fix these bridges but to do this work safely, we need a skilled workforce. Updating our infrastructure creates jobs that pay our residents a decent wage along with economic development.
- Passing this legislation will create skilled union jobs, and improve opportunities for local residents to enter the trades and advance their careers in construction.
- Mr. Chairman, as you can see, the Michigan Laborers Union is ready to get to work on this exciting project that will benefit the Great Lakes Bay Region, provide family-supporting union jobs, and ensure that our community has safe reliable infrastructure.
- I’m urging each of you, Democrats and Republicans, to stand with the Michigan Laborers today to back this important infrastructure project.
- With that, we thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with the committee and are happy to answer any questions you may have.