

**Ontario Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Bill 288 *Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021*
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Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to participate in today's discussion. It is my pleasure to be here on behalf of Canada's 90,000 manufacturers, and our association's 2,500 direct members to support Bill 288 the *Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act*.

Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters' members cover all sizes of companies, from all regions of the province, and all industrial sectors. Manufacturers employ 770,000 Ontarians in a wide range of occupations, helping to make everything from cars to medicines to robots and airplanes. Our sector is vital to the economic success and to the prosperity of the province. The skilled trades are a core component of our entire industry and why it is important for us to be here today.

Manufacturers' number one challenge, are skills and labour shortages. Even during the past year and in the middle of the pandemic, skills and labour shortages remained their primary concern in addition to staying open, staying in business, and staying safe.

We lump “skills” and “labour” shortages together because they are different sides of the same problem for our industry’s workforce. Basically, the lack of skilled workers available in Ontario, is a main driver of our labour shortages. And, because of these labour shortages, our industry does not have the workforce it needs to meet current demand, let alone having the workers they would need to grow and prosper. In short, this problem acts as a massive drag on growth of one of Ontario’s key economic sectors.

When we ask our members, what types of jobs are hardest to fill, the answer is: all of them. From low skill labourers to engineers and project managers our sector struggles to fill key roles. This, despite the fact that we offer stable, fulfilling jobs that are some of the highest paying professions around. But of particular concern is the shortage of skilled trades workers today. A shortage that demographics say will only get worse if we do not take action now.

This is why CME worked closely with the Skilled Trades Panel and now fully supports Bill 288. This bill proposes to undertake critical reforms to how Ontario manages and promotes apprentices and skilled trades in the province. We believe that eliminating the Ontario College of Trades and replacing it with Skilled Trades Ontario- an independent Crown Corporation, will address many of the governance issues that plagued previous models.

Moreover, adopting a simpler, customer focused interface and offering expanded digital services will also simplify life for employers and skilled tradespeople. This will include easier registration and renewals, as well as a smoother equivalency assessments. These are changes that CME and industry asked for, and changes that will be implemented through the creation of Skilled Trades Ontario.

We understand as well that Skilled Trades Ontario will be responsible for promoting careers in the trades. We cannot stress enough how important a task this is, and something that governments, are uniquely positioned to help with. The promotion of careers in the skilled trades should not start in grade 12, but as early as primary school.

To that end, CME currently runs “Open Doors” events with this specific goal in mind. We host students in our facilities to open their eyes to the possibilities in our sector. We believe this work needs to be enhanced and supported by government.

Now, while all these measures will do great things on the skilled trades side, I would be remiss if I did not raise the issue we face with general coordination of skills development in Ontario. To a large extent, the skills needed for the jobs in our industry vary across the province. Furthermore, the skills our industry needs may be vastly different from those of other industries. For all these reasons, we do not believe that skills training can be centrally planned and applied uniformly

across the province. Rather, we need to enable local regions to coordinate the skills development between employers and training institutions for that region.

To get there, CME has long called for the creation of Regional Industry Councils across the province. These councils would act as a forum for large industrial employers, colleges and universities, unions, and local stakeholders to get together and plan out the training to build the skill sets needed for the employment opportunities in that region. This simple concept once existed in Ontario, and solved a lot of the coordination problems around today. We urge the government to fund Regional Industry Councils so that it can help the development of skilled trades and all skills for our sector.

To conclude I will say that right now, there are major shifts happening in manufacturing. The success of these companies, and the prosperity of Ontario, are only possible with a strong, innovative workforce that supports advanced manufacturing. One of the greatest challenges our sector faces today is accessing talent with the right skill sets, particularly in the skilled trades, to drive growth and innovation. We believe the creation of the Skilled Trades Ontario is the first step on the right path. Industry has been plugged into its development all throughout, and we urge that this reliance on industry and stakeholder input be maintained in the months and years ahead. We therefore fully support Bill 288 and hope to see its swift passage.

Thank you again for inviting me, I look forward to the discussion.