



# Submission to The Apprenticeship and Certification Board

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*POWERLINE TECHNICIAN TRADE REGULATION*

**Manitoba Federation of Labour**

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The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is the province's senior central body, chartered by the Canadian Labour Congress to represent the interests of CLC affiliated unions and their members in Manitoba. Manitoba union members are women and men from both the private and public sectors, including manufacturing, public administration, retail, health care, education, natural resources, tourism, agriculture, transportation and many others.

The MFL, IBEW and Building Trades/Allied Hydro Council have lobbied for many years to have Powerline Technicians (PLTs) recognized as a Red Seal trade. We have done so because we believe in the integrity and effectiveness of the apprenticeship model for training and certification of skilled workers, to help meet the labour force needs of today and tomorrow, and help build our province. However, we now find ourselves in the unenviable position of supporting designation in theory, but having strong concerns about the specific, practical proposal before us.

For many decades, the MFL has been the leading voice for workers in Manitoba on occupational health and safety, and has participated actively with government, employers, post-secondary education and other stakeholders on strategies for labour force development, job creation and economic development. Expanding our apprenticeship system, including the designation of PLTs, should support all of these objectives.

A cornerstone of apprenticeship, as a work based post-secondary training program, is one-on-one mentorship and supervision between journey person and apprentice. This close relationship is essential from a training integrity perspective, and it is also essential . particularly in a high risk, severe consequence occupation like PLT . from an occupational health and safety perspective. Manitoba's standard 1:1 apprentice: journey person ratio has stood the test of time because it has proven effective for training skilled tradespeople and for keeping apprentices safe at work.

The current proposal to allow Manitoba Hydro to have an exceptional 4:1 apprentice: journey person ratio . higher than any other jurisdiction in the country . ignores the responsibility of employers to provide safe and healthy workplaces, and exposes apprentices to extremely serious and sometime fatal hazards on the job. A PLT is one of the most hazardous occupations, both in terms of frequency and severity of injury. We

find it incomprehensible that the Apprenticeship Board would entertain such a significant deviation from the normal Manitoba standard for apprenticeship, and the standards applied to PLTs specifically across the country . in a high risk occupation, such as PLT.

It should be noted, also, that many apprentices are young workers and first time workers. All occupational health and safety research suggests that young and first time workers are especially vulnerable to safety and health hazards. These workers need greater protection, not less. For PLTs, because of the High Voltage they encounter on a day to day basis, even just one acute hazard incident could be life altering, or worse still, life ending. PLTs also face potential exposure to asbestos, chemicals, large machinery, explosives and many other hazards.

We are also concerned about the proposal's lack of definition of what constitutes a %worksite+. This is especially important in the context of work that is carried out on projects spanning many kilometers in length. Apprentices cannot be properly trained and mentored, and safely and effectively supervised, through occasional radio contact or cell phone calls. A journey person should be able to see, demonstrate, model, give instruction, assess and provide regular feedback to his/her apprentice to ensure work is being performed accurately and safely.

In conclusion, while we are pleased that PLTs are finally being considered for Red Seal designation, we urge the Apprenticeship Board to heed IBEW's advice and insist on maintaining Manitoba's long-standing standard for safe and effective apprenticeship training.