

DON'T MAKE IT HARDER FOR NJ CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES

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It's hard for construction firms in New Jersey right now. We can't find and train labor fast enough. It was bad enough before the pandemic, but now demand is through the roof.

So when I hear that the NJ Department of Community Affairs is considering scrapping the state plumbing code we all use for training, I have to ask: why do you want to make it harder for us?

You may not know that New Jersey actually has its own plumbing code, not a code adopted from a national code writing body. Our plumbing code is all Jersey: developed by volunteers from across our state who have expertise in plumbing systems and emerging technologies. It's been our code since 1977, and has been updated every three years since. It's got everything we need: disaster resiliency, cost-saving measures for construction, guidelines on advanced water saving technologies. Because experts from throughout the building industry contribute to regular review, our New Jersey plumbing code sets the right balance between managing short-term building costs and long-term operating and maintenance costs.

Nonetheless, the Uniform Construction Code Advisory Board at the NJ Department of Community Affairs has halted the regular updating process to request an unnecessary technical comparison of our code with this other model plumbing code.

Why consider a change now? Good question. The proposed change would replace the state's homegrown code with a national model code that wasn't developed by New Jerseyans for New Jersey. At a minimum, such a change will require a costly customization process of amendments just to get close to what we already have.

Most concerning are the time and costs associated with retraining every licensed plumber in the state to the new code, not to mention the costs to municipalities to retrain plumbing inspectors. Contracting firms, plumbers and municipalities will all be on the hook for purchasing the new code books involved. Contracting firms like mine will have to take people off the job for retraining. Why would our state impose these burdens on us so that a model code publisher from another state can get more coin from us?

In the end, this will hit your wallet, too. Retraining all plumbing inspectors in the state would be a financial and logistical burden at a total cost of millions of dollars. Guess who will ultimately pay for that? All of us New Jersey taxpayers who are already burdened with the highest property taxes in the country!

I can tell you that our legacy New Jersey plumbing code is something to be proud of. Our process to update and amend our code is open and transparent. Special interests cannot and do not dominate. Volunteers like me take the time to do this right--it's our home, too.

I would ask the Uniform Construction Code Advisory Board members to consider all these consequences of a potential change and to resume the process to keep our New Jersey plumbing code.

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