

# Scores Of Contractors Say Don't Repeal WV Prevailing Wage

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – At least 100 West Virginia contracting companies have written to state senators opposing the repeal of the state's prevailing wage law, according to state lawmakers.

Many of the letters say the law keeps local contractors on a level playing field with out-of-state firms.

John Strickland, president of the Maynard C. Smith Construction Co. of Kanawha City, says the prevailing wage has given West Virginia contractors space to develop a skilled and productive workforce.

He says without it there's nothing to stop outside companies from bringing in out-of-state, minimum-wage workers – and undercutting 300 to 400 local businesses.

"Local contractors and a road contractor from out of state will compete, and we won't be on a level playing field," he points out. "So the local contractor will loose that project."

Supporters of repeal say it could reduce building costs on public projects – although several studies have found it would actually lower quality and raise costs in the long run.

The Senate is likely to vote on the measure this week.

Some of the letters argue that the state would lose more in lower income tax revenue and higher public assistance costs than it could hope to gain in reduced construction costs.

One separate study projected as much as \$80 million a year in lost taxes.

Another found the wage enough to keep many from relying on programs such as food stamps.

Dan Tennant, sales manager for Kalkreuth Roofing, the nation's sixth-largest roofing company, says he applauds state lawmakers for trying to save taxpayer money.

But he says an Ohio County journeymen roofer only makes \$28 an hour under the prevailing wage – more like \$18 an hour once you count down time.

"No one's getting rich in the trades," he maintains. "If they're careful with their money, they can make a nice living. But the important thing to know is none of them are on public assistance."

A report by the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy found if you include quality and productivity, prevailing-wage work here costs less than non-prevailing wage work in neighboring states.

And Tennant says that's actually why Ohio is moving to put a prevailing wage more in place, just as West Virginia is considering its repeal.

"One of the things driving Ohio's decision to allow Prevailing Wage was the poor quality of the schools

that were being built," he states.

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