

Testimony from Thad Tomei  
International Union of Elevator Constructors (IUEC)

In strong support of HB 1381 – Relating to Elevator Mechanics

Senate Committee on Consumer Protection and Health  
Tuesday, March 14, 9 am

Aloha Chair Baker and members of the committee,

My name is Thad Tomei and I am testifying on behalf of IUEC in strong support of House Bill 1381. In my former position as Business Manager of Local 126, I represented almost 200 men and women living and working in the elevator industry in the State of Hawaii. Our organization is committed to promoting public safety and the general welfare of the elevator industry.

I am an elevator mechanic. I entered the elevator industry in 1966 as a Helper or Apprentice. I passed our 4 year education and training program and I then passed a comprehensive exam to reach the position of Mechanic or Journeyman. In my years in the field I have worked for such employers as Montgomery, Otis Elevator, Thyssen Elevator and Kone Elevator.

On my first day in the industry, I received a hardhat and a “safety belt”. Over time safety belts have evolved into harnesses. I almost immediately received a bundle of course material in the mail. It was all material about how to work safely in the elevator industry. I began to work alongside a mechanic who had previously been through the education program. He showed me the practical applications of the material that had been in the books.

Over the next four years I would learn the skills that would make me a competent elevator mechanic that can keep my workplace, those around me and the general public safe. In my first year, I was taught the basic mechanics of the elevator industry and was taught such skills as stacking steel rails, loading thousands of pounds of counterweights and how to use those counterweights to properly balance an elevator.

The next phase of my elevator training was basic electricity. I learned things like ohms law and electrical power theory to help control electric elevator motors and their various components. I learned generator theory and applications. I learned about rectifiers and transformers. I hated this course. Despite getting good grades throughout all of my schooling, this course gave me fits. One night per week, four hours per night for over thirty weeks. I studied hard and grew to learn it and pass the exams.

During my last year of apprenticeship training I learned about circuit tracing. I was pleased to find out that I was good at it. After struggling through basic electricity, I was able to understand how current needed to flow through a great number of circuits to get to that magic place where a brake picks and an up or a down relay fires and a vertical city is made possible. As I learned how circuits worked, I also learned that at times as an elevator mechanic I may need to bypass

circuits in order to fix a problem. I learned about door lock circuits which tell the controls that the doors are closed and that the elevator is safe to run. I learned about slow down and stopping circuits, so that I could control an elevator coming into a floor. I learned how to keep myself, those around me and the elevator riding public safe.

From a public policy standpoint, there is tremendous reason to improve the safety of elevators and other conveyances. While the elevator industry is relatively safe when compared to other areas of construction, when something does go wrong, the stakes are high and injuries can be serious or even fatal. The public policy implications of ensuring safe elevators and other conveyances obviously do not stop at individuals working on or near them, but also spills over to those members of the public – including Hawaii residents and visitors – who ride on elevators and escalators every day.

The Elevator Industry is undergoing rapid technological advancements that will result in increased requirements. The Elevator Industry will continue to require highly skilled professionals to install, service, maintain and test conveyances. Requiring continuing education classes is the best way to help elevator mechanics learn new technologies and increase their skills.

Elevator Inspectors also need to attend continuing education classes learn new technologies and new elevator safety code updates. Many of us are also too familiar with stories about how malfunctioning elevators can lead to tragedy for riders.

For example, consider New Year's Eve of 2015, just moments after helping another person exit an elevator that had stalled between 2 floors, a young man in New York City was crushed to death by that stalled elevator when it started to move. On February 1, 2017 a two year old boy in Little Rock, Arkansas somehow became trapped underneath a home elevator and died. The details of this horrific accident are still coming in.

In summary, to ensure the safety of the workers in this industry and the riding public, I urge you to pass this important piece of elevator safety legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today.