



Enterprise Association of Steamfitters Local Union 638

OF

STEAM, HOT WATER, HYDRAULIC, SPRINKLER, PNEUMATIC TUBE, COMPRESSED AIR, ICE MACHINE, AIR CONDITIONING
AND GENERAL PIPE FITTERS OF NEW YORK AND LONG ISLAND, A.F.L.-C.I.O.

STEAMFITTERS LOCAL UNION 638 OF THE UNITED ASSOCIATION

The Enterprise Association of Steamfitters Local 638 represents approximately 9,000 hardworking men and women installing HVAC, mechanical and life-saving fire suppression sprinkler systems. Union members have undergone five years of best-in-class training and education through a member-funded apprenticeship program. A journeyman steamfitter is compensated for this skill and training with a middle-class, family-sustaining wage and health and retirement benefits that has come from 140 years of collective bargaining from their union.

It is with this context that we express concern about the current trajectory of negotiations in the New York State Legislature around the need for affordable housing construction and the wage standards attached to state subsidies for private developers, mainly via a renewed version of the failed 421a tax abatement program. Current proposals to establish a wage floor for a tax abatement program are currently centered around a wage rate that is below the prevailing rate for every trade in the New York City Building Trades, despite any evidence that affordable housing cannot be built with family-sustaining, union-bargained prevailing wage. Like our union, every trade has negotiated a wage appropriate to their level of skill and the training needed for their particular job. A laborer is not the same as a steamfitter, which is not the same as a plumber or an electrician. Training requirements can range from 3-5 years, and the state-recognized certifications and licensing differ amongst the trades across the construction industry. To demand that our members take a wage cut in order to support affordable housing will do nothing to change the real estate-driven narrative that pits a false choice between affordable housing and union wages.

If the State is going to take a sensible approach to subsidizing housing, it cannot do it on the backs of construction workers, who have already been asked to compromise their union-bargained wages for affordable housing development. Good faith negotiation on a wage floor should start at the point of prevailing wage, which is the legally recognized rate that a construction worker is owed for his/her labor and is specifically tailored to the trade and its commensurate skill. For decades now, wage standards have fallen in the construction industry as the affordability crisis and protections for tenants have gotten worse. Further lowering the wage floor for construction workers with a revival of the failed 421a program will not shift this dynamic. It is time to try something new and prove to New Yorkers that we can create thousands of good paying union jobs while providing high-quality, affordable housing across the five boroughs of New York.

The Enterprise Association of Steamfitters Local 638 is fully committed to working with the Legislature, Governor and any industry stakeholder that is seriously concerned about tackling the twin crisis of jobs and housing in New York. I urge labor's ally in the legislature to do what you can to ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the 421a era, and that we only settle for public policy that creates union jobs, provides affordable housing and regrows the middle class. Should you have any questions or wish to speak in person, please don't hesitate to contact me.

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