



January 30, 2024

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan  
Chair, House Health and Human Services Committee  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: SUPPORT RI House Bill 7297

Dear Chair Donovan:

As Rhode Island's state apprenticeship agency intermediary, Building Futures is pleased to offer this Letter of Support for House Bill 7297, which would create a pathway to optician licensure through Registered Apprenticeship. By building this pathway, Rhode Island will join 18 other states who are meeting their growing optometry workforce needs through an innovative and rigorous earn-while-you-learn model.

Building Futures' mission is to meet employer need for skilled workers through Registered Apprenticeship, creating equitable paths to family-sustaining careers for Rhode Islanders. Alongside the Opticians Association of Rhode Island, Building Futures recognizes the urgent need to create an in state, accessible path to optician licensure. Currently, the only path to licensure is through a two-year opticianry degree program - which Rhode Island does not have. Establishing a Registered Apprenticeship pathway to licensure will meet this need for employers and future opticians, adding jobs to a growing industry and enabling Rhode Islanders to pursue rewarding careers in optometry.

Registered Apprenticeship is a proven workforce development model that helps Rhode Island workers launch new careers and employers recruit and retain top talent. In 2015, Building Futures and the RI Department of Labor and Training launched their Apprenticeship RI initiative to expand the apprenticeship model beyond construction to manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, and green and plant-based industries. As a result, registered apprentices in non-construction occupations have increased from 0 to 2000+ through 45 new apprenticeship occupations, including several healthcare occupations. Apprenticeship has proven a powerful workforce equity strategy; 47% of current and completed non-trade apprentices are women, 37% are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and 19% are BIPOC women.

Building Futures is excited about the potential impact this initiative will have on the opticianry industry in Rhode Island. Our fifteen years of experience leveraging registered apprenticeship for equity in Rhode Island - including developing apprenticeships for several healthcare occupations - uniquely equips us to support the implementation of this licensure pathway. Please do not hesitate to reach out should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Andrew L. Cortés  
President & CEO