

From recycling to solar power and construction, the green industry's demand for skilled workers is growing and shows no signs of slowing down.

In fact, in a recent report on green jobs, Kelly Services says Maryland is among the top five hottest states for these jobs.

That's why I've introduced a proposal to train our county's underemployed and unemployed youth and transitioning adults to fill this expanding field.

The Green Jobs Apprenticeship Program would be part of Worksource Montgomery, whose CEO, Ellie Giles, helped craft the proposal.

Examples of the fields these trained workers would enter: solar energy systems, green roofs, geothermal systems, rainwater catchments, pervious pavement, building thermal walls, wind power, natural gas, sewer treatment and other environmental technologies.

Demand for skilled workers in these fields will only growing in the coming years, with significant development scheduled in county buildings, schools, neighborhoods surrounding the Purple Line, downtown Wheaton and White Oak. All these projects will involve green technologies.

It's a global phenomenon, according to the International Labour Organization.

In recent years, 2.3 million people have found new jobs in the renewable energy sector alone, "and the potential for job growth in the sector is huge. Employment in alternative energies may rise to 2.1 million in wind and 6.3 million in solar power by 2030," the organization reports.

This new apprenticeship program will truly be a win-win-win for Montgomery County. It will not only help meet the needs of both industry and job-seekers in the new green economy, but strengthen our county's commitment to improving the environment.

Several speakers at the May 15 [public hearing](#) on the bill emphasized these points.

The demand for skilled green workers is there, said Jeff Guido, Maryland field representative of Community Hub for Opportunities in Construction Employment. C.H.O.I.C.E. is an office of North America's Building Trades Unions that works with the 28 local unions in the greater Baltimore and Washington, D.C., region.

"Green energy is the future, is the way to go," said Guido, who also helped craft the proposal.

“LEED energy and environmental design is everyone’s goal when they put a building up,” he said. His organization has “1,200 signatory contractors that are ready to participate in this program.”

Crystal Ruiz, government relations manager with the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, said a new County green apprenticeship program will dovetail with the utility’s own training program.

“When we talk about clean-energy jobs, we are talking about new jobs for middle-skilled laborers in our evolving global economy,” Ruiz said at Tuesday’s hearing. “These apprenticeships afford employers an opportunity to evaluate employees in a real-work environment.”

The green jobs program is a “timely and welcome program that will facilitate greater access to this industry for many of our residents,” said George Escobar, senior director of services at CASA, which already offers vocational training courses. These include green-jobs courses in landscaping and solar panels, which among the most popular, with long waiting lists. He also urged WorkSource Montgomery to collaborate with CASA on growing the participation of working-class immigrant communities in the program.

Preserving both the environment and creating middle-class jobs are not mutually exclusive, said Michal Freedman of the Sierra Club Montgomery County Group.

“Transitioning to a clean renewable energy system will create opportunities for new job creation,” Freedman said. “To ensure that we have sufficient numbers of skilled workers right here in Montgomery County ... we must create high-quality training programs that are affordable and equitable. Creating an apprenticeship program is exactly the right way to go about this.”

Freedman added that this type of program has been effective elsewhere in the country.

The county’s program can help close our schools’ achievement gap, by providing a new career advancement opportunity for students seeking opportunities outside of traditional classroom settings.

It also could serve as a needed boost to our citizens returning from incarceration by providing them with a new avenue to pursue job training and placements.

The bill also has broad support among my council colleagues, with Roger Berliner, Marc Elrich, Sidney Katz, George Leventhal, Council Vice President Nancy Navarro and Craig Rice signing on as co-sponsors.

At this point, no county funding is proposed. Rather, Worksource Montgomery will seek outside grants to fund the program.

A copy of the bill and legislative analysis are here: [bit.ly/2lkBfgR](https://bit.ly/2lkBfgR).

A worksession on the bill is scheduled for June 11 with the council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee.













