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STEEL MANUFACTURERS
ASSOCIATION

May 17, 2024

The Honorable Rick Crawford
2422 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Mrvan
1607 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: Opposition to S. 4149, the Mass Timber Federal Buildings Act

Dear Representatives Crawford and Mrvan:

On behalf of the United States steel design and construction industry, we are writing to express our strong opposition to the recently introduced [Mass Timber Federal Buildings Act](#). While we support the exploration and development of innovative building materials, this bill and similar efforts create an unfair contracting preference and would ultimately hinder rather than promote responsible construction practices. Some other current efforts to promote mass timber preferences include:

- [A Senate letter dated November 15, 2023 to Commissioner Doomes](#)
- [Army Corps of Engineers Engineering and Construction Bulletin](#)

This bill and similar efforts mandate a contracting preference for projects using wood products. This disrupts the competitive bidding process, potentially favoring specific building materials over other domestically-made products that may be more cost-effective or better suited for a particular project. A focus on the lowest responsible bid, rather than mandated material use, ensures taxpayers receive the best value for their investment. It would amount to crony capitalism on an epic scale.

Furthermore, a surge in demand for wood products due to this anti-competitive favoritism could strain supply chains and drive up material costs. This not only increases project costs for public buildings but could also have a ripple effect on the broader construction industry.

The stated goal of this bill is to promote sustainability in public buildings. However, true sustainability goes beyond just the materials used. Sustainable construction encompasses a holistic approach, including factors like energy efficiency, durability, life cycle analysis, and responsible sourcing.



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A better approach would be to incentivize sustainable practices across the board, regardless of material type. This could include awarding bonus points in the bidding process for projects

demonstrating superior energy performance, using materials with high recycled content, or incorporating innovative building techniques that improve overall building efficiency.

While the mass timber industry promises environmental benefits, serious questions remain regarding their actual carbon costs in large-scale construction projects and their fire safety track record. Extensive testing and code development are necessary to ensure these materials meet rigorous safety standards. Granting a contracting preference before these concerns are fully addressed could compromise public safety in the pursuit of misleading environmental claims.

The construction industry is constantly evolving, and mass timber should be encouraged to adopt more sustainable practices. The private sector is already actively exploring and developing these materials. A government mandate that favors one industry over another, funded by taxpayers, is ill-advised.

By creating a level playing field and focusing on sustainable practices as a whole, we can ensure the best materials and construction methods are chosen for each project while promoting responsible innovation without sacrificing cost-effectiveness or safety.

I urge you and your colleagues to oppose the Mass Timber Federal Buildings Act and instead advocate for policies that incentivize sustainable construction practices across the board, regardless of material type.

Sincerely,

Philip K. Bell
President
Steel Manufacturers Association

Kevin M. Dempsey
President & CEO
American Iron & Steel Institute

Brian Raff
Vice President
American Institute of
Steel Construction