



Tuesday, March 9, 2021

RE: DRAFT TESTIMONY – HE&EA, PH 3/9

Good morning Senator Haskell, Representative Elliot, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Committee. My name is Kelli Vallieres, PhD, and I am the Executive Director of the Office of Workforce Strategy and the Vice Chair of the Governor's Workforce Council. I am here today to testify concerning H.B. 5668, An Act Requiring The Office Of Higher Education To Establish A Microcredential Pilot Program.

The Governor's Workforce Council and the **Office of Workforce Strategy** have been tasked developing the state's workforce strategy across the state's Pre-K through retirement pipeline and coordinating workforce programs across businesses, educators, trainers, state agencies, state workforce boards, non-profits, and others. The primary goal of the Governor's Workforce Council is to ensure that Connecticut develops the most accessible, equitable, and high-quality workforce in the country that remains responsive to the changing needs of the 21st century economy through innovative curricula and programming.

The Governor's Workforce Council released a statewide [strategic plan](#) on workforce development in October 2020. There are four central pillars of the strategic plan: partnering with business to ensure their needs are front and center in the design of workforce programs, aligning the needs of employers with educational curricula through the creation of meaningful career pathway programs, removing barriers to sustained workforce participation, and building robust, inclusive, and intuitive data systems that allow students and job seekers to make data-driven decisions about their education and careers.

H.B. 5668 proposes establishing a pilot program to develop a virtual platform on which microcredentials may be earned or renewed by state residents and offered by microcredential providers. The Office of Workforce Strategy is certainly aligned with the importance of residents having access to high-quality and affordable programs that issue industry-recognized credentials so that they may enter a new career pathway or upskill within their current line of work.

In line with this goal, Governor Lamont has introduced S.B. 881, An Act Concerning Workforce Development, which proposes the creation of a credential registry system. This system is designed to serve as a repository of all of the credentials (e.g., short-term certificates, associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, apprenticeships, etc.) offered in Connecticut. It also requires that a minimum amount of data be shared on each credential program, such as cost, skills required, industry, occupation, location, and a direct link so that the student can enroll in



the program of their choice. This registry is designed to be a simple, intuitive, and comprehensive system that allows Connecticut students and job seekers to explore different programs and make a selection based off which one aligns closest with their academic and career goals. It will be critical to leverage the registry going forward so that Connecticut-based programs are leveraged and prioritized by students and job seekers.

The proposed credential registry does not currently include microcredentials developed by national organizations, such as [Coursera](#), [Edx](#), and [Udacity](#), that are providing students across the country with high-quality microcredential programs. Connecticut should seek to leverage the existing credentialing infrastructure in the state before considering national organizations. Where possible, and in a coordinated effort with existing Connecticut educational providers, Connecticut should seek to leverage this existing network of national providers to expand the list of high-quality credentials offered to residents in the state.

As an initial response to the pandemic, the Office of the Governor, the Office of Workforce Strategy, the regional workforce development boards, and the Governor's Workforce Council partnered with several national skills providers, such as 180Skills, Skillssoft, and Metrix Learning to issue microcredential learning licenses in high-demand industries, such as IT, Business Services, and Manufacturing, to residents, free of charge. These types of partnerships are critical to growing the existing credential infrastructure in the state.

The Office of Workforce Strategy is in alignment with the goals of this proposal.