

Friday, March 26, 2021

RE: Testimony regarding Senate Bill 885 An Act Implementing The Governor's Budget Recommendations for General Government.

Good morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Sylvia Shepard and I live in Wilton CT and I am a partner at Social Venture Partners-CT. I would like to testify concerning S.B. 885 An Act Implementing The Governor's Budget Recommendations for General Government.

The primary goal of the Governor's Workforce Council (GWC) and the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) is to ensure that Connecticut develops the most accessible, equitable, and high-quality workforce in the country. In order to achieve this goal, the Governor's Workforce Council released its strategic plan on workforce development in October 2020 which includes 19 different strategic initiatives, each of which are critical to the development of a high-performing overall system. Ensuring the Office of Workforce Strategy has the organizational flexibility it needs to ensure effective coordination and completion of the different initiatives of the GWC will be paramount.

I was part of a volunteer team of SVP partners who spent hundreds of hours in support of the members of the GWC, who also volunteered hundreds of hours to the effort to develop this strategic workforce development plan for Connecticut. All of us, who came together, across sectors and systems, got to appreciate and understand each other and what each of us represented. The plan is personal for many of us, and we believe in it, but we also know that its implementation is dependent on the successful coordination between educators, businesses, community organizations and the workforce investment boards. This coordination across systems, sectors and cities is incredibly difficult. It requires an office dedicated to serving this function: promoting cooperation between the stakeholders, not competition; identifying best practices and providing incentives for sharing and scaling these practices, not focusing exclusively on local issues and problems; ensuring that resources are distributed based on fairness and need, not power; actively facilitating the development of deep and productive relationships between businesses, educators and community organizations, not just stating that these relationships are important.

What I discovered in my work with the Manufacturing subcommittee and the Work-Based Learning subcommittee is that there are many exceptional programs around the state. I also learned that there has been an incredible amount of enthusiasm and excitement generated by the Governor's Workforce Council effort. Everyone we approached wanted to help. All the stakeholders believe the time is right to weave these programs into a larger quilt of unique, but

connected programs that build on each other's strengths. We need a skillful weaver for this effort, someone who understands all the stakeholders. We are incredibly fortunate to have Kelli-Marie Vallieres to take on this role. And with the support of the Office of Workforce Strategy, I am confident that she can succeed. Please do not squander the momentum and amazing surge of energy associated with this effort. It feels transformative. I have lived in CT, for most of my life, after growing up in Wisconsin as a 5th generation owner of a manufacturing company, and just as we are preparing to pass our company down to the 6th generation, I think it is time to pass our old workforce development model to Kelli and her team. They are poised and ready to move forward with a new model that will best position Connecticut to thrive in a new connected economy. I ask you to give them a chance.