



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 Dr. Kelli-Marie Vallieres, and I am the Executive Director of the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) and the Vice Chair of the Governor's Workforce Council. I am here today to testify in support of S.B. 885 An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for General Government. I thank the Governor for proposing such important legislation, which would statutorily establish the Office of Workforce Strategy and create the position of the state's Chief Workforce Officer.

The Governor's Workforce Council and the **Office of Workforce Strategy** have been tasked with setting workforce strategy and policy 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.

In order to achieve this goal, the Governor's Workforce Council released its strategic plan on workforce development in October 2020 which includes 19 strategic initiatives, each of which is critical to the development of a high-performing workforce development system. To effectively implement the strategy around the goals and initiatives, my team in the Office of Workforce Strategy has engaged with hundreds of stakeholders to coordinate an array of different perspectives that will inform the plan moving forward.

Since the inception of the Governor's Workforce Council, the Office of Workforce Strategy has taken the lead on coordinating different stakeholders across the state and organizing them into groups and committees to execute on the goals and objectives of the initiatives in the strategic plan. Moving forward, it is critical that the Office of Workforce Strategy have the ability to convene state agencies (e.g., CSDE, DOL, OHE), businesses, educational institutions, regional workforce boards, and community organizations to develop and manage working groups focused on implementing the GWC strategic plan.



Strong alignment between business partners and workforce training providers is critical to the success of a workforce development system. One of the key components missing in previous workforce development programs in the state was a coordinated effort to engage businesses directly on how training and certification programs were configured so that the programs were aligned with the actual needs of businesses that have open jobs to fill. The Office of Workforce Strategy, through its relationship with business members on the Governor's Workforce Council, is addressing this issue by partnering more closely with businesses to support their workforce development and hiring efforts so that businesses are moving to and growing in CT. The Office of Workforce Strategy is also working closely with educational partners across the state to ensure that their curriculum is aligned with the needs of industry and is flexible enough to meet the rapidly changing needs of business.

There are many workforce programs in the state, managed by or housed in a variety of different state agencies, businesses, regional workforce development boards, community organizations, municipalities, or other entities. Coordinating these siloed efforts so that the program objectives align to the unified strategic plan is critical. The Office of Workforce Strategy has begun to address this issue by working with state agencies, at the Commissioner level, to coordinate workforce development programs.

Equity in workforce development and access to education and training opportunities for all of our state residents, especially those in underserved populations in communities of color, disabled persons, veterans, the reentry population, and opportunity youth is a major focus for my team. We have engaged, and will continue to engage, with community organizations and state agencies that represent each of these underserved populations to ensure that their needs related to job training and education programs are being addressed.

Section 11 of S.B. 885 codifies the Office of Workforce Strategy within the Department of Economic and Community Development for administrative purposes only (APO). Currently, in order to design inter-agency programs and policies, commissioners must work directly with their counterparts in other agencies. Given the central role of our office to coordinate workforce programs across state agencies, it is critical that the Office of Workforce Strategy remain as an APO so that OWS can work directly with commissioners on program coordination.

I look forward to the opportunity to work with the Legislature to align the needs of industry with our education and training providers so that we can support the current job industry and



the needs of our residents. This work has been made all the more urgent due to the numbers of individuals displaced from work during the pandemic. I am happy to answer any of your questions or concerns.

Best regards,

Dr. Kelli Vallieres