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**Commerce Committee*****H.B. No. 5584: An Act Increasing Funding for the Incumbent Worker Training Program***

Submitted by Dr. Alice Pritchard, Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund, on behalf of the Campaign for a Working Connecticut  
 March 6, 2008

My name is Alice Pritchard and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund. Today, I am here on behalf of the Campaign for a Working Connecticut. The Campaign urges your support of ***H.B. No. 5584: An Act Increasing Funding for the Incumbent Worker Training Program.***

The Campaign mission is to promote the state's economic competitiveness through the development of sustainable, effective workforce solutions to increase workers' skills and advance families to self-sufficiency. The Campaign is a unique and diverse state-wide coalition, which includes over forty members consisting of employers, education and training providers, workforce investment boards, advocates, and chambers of commerce.

H.B. No. 5584 is an important step towards strengthening Connecticut's economic future. The state desperately needs to invest in our current workforce, as our present efforts pale in comparison to our neighboring states:

- Massachusetts currently spends \$6.54 and Rhode Island spends \$16.93 per person on incumbent worker training. Connecticut trails far behind these states with an investment of only \$.16 per worker!<sup>1</sup>
- Connecticut currently spends \$500,000 on incumbent worker training, which is slight compared to Massachusetts's and Rhode Island's investments of \$21,000,000 and \$9,000,000, respectively. H.B. 5584 calls for a significant increase in our state's investment to \$5,000,000.

Connecticut's economic success ultimately will depend on its ability to consistently produce a highly skilled workforce with the prerequisite basic and technical skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. The state must invest in building collaborative training, education, and skills development programs among employers and the workforce development system for those in need of basic and/or technical skill development. Without these skills, many individuals will be unable to meet the growing technological needs of their employers in the knowledge economy.

Fortunately, Connecticut has an untapped pool of talent to unlock—the already employed, low-wage workers who are the forgotten middle households. This group could serve as an economic asset for immediate, as well as, future economic growth. The Connecticut Department of Labor estimates that 48% of our state's labor

<sup>1</sup> Workforce Alliance. *State of the Workforce 2007: The Haves, Have-Nots and Used-to-Haves.*

market consists of middle-skilled jobs, our nurses, automotive mechanics, general maintenance and repair workers, and carpenters; however, only 40% of our state's workers are likely to have the necessary training for these jobs. These are primary workforce shortage areas that can be addressed through incumbent worker programs. H.B. 5584 is the solution to this training gap.

We need to start investing in workforce development and fill in the gap of federal dollars if we wish to create an environment for Connecticut's economic growth. The Campaign for a Working Connecticut has also been committed to supporting the Department of Economic and Community Development in their critical task of developing an economic strategic plan for the state under Public Act 07-239 and testified at eight out of the ten strategic meetings which occurred throughout the state between November and January. The Campaign wishes to play an integral role in building an economically prosperous Connecticut now and into the future. Working together, we can create an economic security plan that benefits all of Connecticut's workers, employers, families, and communities. Our investment can begin with the passage of H.B. 5584.