

Testimony by Lawrence D. McHugh
President, Middlesex Chamber of Commerce
Before the Committee on Education
Monday, March 9, 2009

Good afternoon, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee.

I am Lawrence McHugh, President of the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Connecticut State University System. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you today. I recognize that you have a very full agenda and many people to hear from, so I will be brief.

First, I would be remiss if I did not express my appreciation and the appreciation of my colleagues on the Board of Trustees and in the business community, for your leadership and dedication to public education in the State of Connecticut. We are fortunate that our legislature keeps education at the forefront, from pre-kindergarten through college.

I am here today regarding House Bill 6370, An Act Concerning a Middle College System.

As you probably know, I spent many years coaching in addition to my work at the Chamber. I strongly believe in the power of teamwork, and I strongly believe in Connecticut. So, when it comes to mapping out a future for this great state, we are all on the same team – and our elected leaders here at the Capitol are calling the signals.

I am simply here to tell you, with all due respect, that if Connecticut is to have the thriving economy that we all desire, with new and growing businesses all across the state, we must provide effective educational pathways that permit students to develop the technical skills that businesses require.

The Middlesex Chamber has 2400 members, mostly small and medium sized businesses, many seeking individuals with education that goes beyond high school in areas such as manufacturing, technology, healthcare and renewable energy.

As a state, when we look ahead, there is no question that we will need young people who are adept in these fields, and others, that will fuel economic growth. And we should also provide effective ways to meet the need for skilled craftsmen who can take advantage of opportunities that will be in Connecticut's future.

As we all know, our competition today comes from everywhere. It comes not only from neighboring states, or even countries in this hemisphere, but from everywhere around the world. We must be ready to respond, and prepare our young people for jobs that will allow them to stay in our state, help our businesses flourish, contribute to our quality of life, and build a sound and secure future. That is in their best interest, and in ours.

To do that, we need to explore any and all options that can address the need for technical expertise, not only in the fields we know today, but those that are just emerging, and may become the growth industries of tomorrow. I encourage any effort that will result in allowing students to obtain college credit while still in high school, eases the transition from high school to college, and supports the business community becoming more involved in identifying what graduates will need to help Connecticut businesses succeed.

I may not be an expert on the nuances of education, but I do know that we ignore the technical fields and skilled crafts at our own peril. If young people in Connecticut have those skills, companies will locate here and grow here. If not, they will pick up and move elsewhere.

So, as you consider this proposal, and the others before you, I would urge you to consider not only the alignment of our educational systems, but the needs of our businesses and the impact these decisions will have on our prospects for the future we're all working for.

I certainly do not underestimate the task ahead, not only in education, but all the issues that you are grappling with. But, as I said at the outset, we're all on the same team, and I am confident that we will all come out of this stronger and better than ever.

Thank you very much.
