

 **CharterOak**  
**STATE COLLEGE**  

---

---

**Degrees Without Boundaries**

**Children's Committee**

**Testimony by**  
**Ed Klonoski**  
**February 19, 2009**

**Raised Bill 6411**

**President, Charter Oak State College**

Senator Musto, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children -

I am submitting testimony on **Raised Bill 6411, AN ACT CONCERNING REDUCTION IN CHILD POVERTY AND INVESTMENT IN PREVENTION**. To reduce child poverty and invest in prevention services while reducing spending for children, youth and families in crisis.

It won't surprise you to hear that we at Charter Oak State College believe that earning a college degree is key to increasing wage potential; and it is improved wage potential that increases self-sufficiency and moves many disadvantaged and underserved families out of poverty. As many of you know, Charter Oak State College's Women in Transition program (WIT) began in 2000 as a unique distance learning initiative for underemployed, single mothers who have some college credits but no degree. Taking online courses eliminates the barriers that are common to low-income families – childcare, transportation and educational costs. That program leverages funding from Pell grants, State aid, foundations, corporations, college waivers, and individual donors. In fact, with the support of the General Assembly for the Higher Education Matching Funds, Charter Oak's Foundation has raised over \$250,000 for its WIT Endowment Fund which helps to support 4 or more students each year.

In 2007, the General Assembly, with the help of many on this committee, funded the CT WAGE (Workforce Advancement Grants for Education) in the amount of \$140,000. That program grew out of the WIT program and targets low-income single males and parents. Since that time, we have had several rescissions against the program, but currently it is still in the FY 10 and FY 11 budgets.

Like the WIT participants, the CT WAGE students are recruited from community and nonprofit organizations as well as referrals from program participants, alumni and others. Many of these students would never dream they could complete their degree without eliminating the main barriers – scholarships, technological resources, and the WIT / CT WAGE Coordinator.

The Program Coordinator is crucial to its success. These participants need intensive academic advisement and support. Many times, problems unrelated to their academic work become overwhelming. They need "tough love" – encouragement and positive suggestions on how to continue their education even when life situations become overpowering. Without a safety net and

continual encouragement, these impediments can easily cause a person, who already has a low self-esteem, to give up. Moreover, the Program Coordinator is, in many ways, the reason for our 80% retention / graduation rate.

Although this bill does not address education, we believe that education is a critical component if we are to provide a way out of poverty for many low-wage families. The funding that you provided to the CT WAGE program is helping not only the adults it directly serves, but the children of those families.

I have attached the testimony of two CT WAGE participants along with our RBA analysis of the program. I hope that in your deliberations that you will also consider the importance of education as a key pathway out of poverty.

Attachments

**Charter Oak State College**  
**FY 2008-09 New Program**  
*CT WAGE*

Program	<b>CT WAGE – CT Workforce Advancement Grants for Education</b>
<b>FY 09 Funding</b>	\$140,000 allocated by General Assembly but cut 3%: \$135,800
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To help reduce poverty in Connecticut</li> <li>• Ensure access to postsecondary education for low-wage earners by breaking down barriers</li> <li>• Strengthen ability of parents in low-income jobs to support themselves and their families to become productive members of the community</li> </ul>
<b>Key Components of Program Afforded to CT WAGE Participant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous academic, career and personal counseling</li> <li>• Laptop and printer (if needed)</li> <li>• Internet service</li> <li>• Online tutoring</li> <li>• Online library resources (eGlobal Library)</li> <li>• Online and on ground peer network</li> <li>• Scholarships for educational needs not covered by Pell Grants</li> <li>• Technology support</li> </ul>
<b>Why Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Postsecondary education increase Connecticut's workforce retention.</li> <li>• Postsecondary education provides increase in wage earnings</li> <li>• 11% of adult population does not have postsecondary degree (<i>Measuring Up 2006</i>)</li> <li>• Connecticut's investment in need-based financial aid is very low when compared with top-performing state and it has declined since 1992. (<i>Measuring Up 2006</i>)</li> <li>• It is now critical for individuals to attain some level of education beyond high school and for the state in which they live to compete in a global economy</li> <li>• Increase in educational attainment results in higher personal income, a better skilled and more adaptable workforce, fewer demands on social services, higher level of community involvement and better decisions regarding healthcare and personal finance</li> </ul>
<b>Target Group – Fall 2007 Semester ***</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fathers with dependent children and / or married parents who are in low income jobs (as set forth by 2007 Federal Poverty and State Median Guidelines and fall within 75% of the SMI)</li> </ul>
<b>Target Group – Spring 2008 Semester ***</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fathers with dependent children in low-wage jobs</li> </ul>

<b>Goals / Objectives</b>	Increase graduation rate Retention rate of 77% Improve academic performance Increased job earnings Increased self esteem
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track academic progress</li> <li>• Monitor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improvement in children's school performance</li> <li>- Increased wage earnings</li> <li>- Improved technology skills</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Civic benefits for community</li> <li>• Pursuit of additional education after completion of post-secondary education</li> <li>• Track participant one year after graduation</li> </ul>
<b>Recruitment Collaborators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fatherhood Initiative (through DSS)</li> <li>• Male Involvement Initiative</li> <li>• Fathers for Life Program</li> <li>• CONNTAC, Inc.</li> <li>• New Opportunities</li> <li>• Early Childhood and After School Program Directors</li> <li>• CT Community Colleges</li> <li>• Saint Raphael's Healthy Start</li> </ul>
<b>Partnerships **</b>	Gateway Community College
	Northwestern CT Community College – Fall 2008

\*\* Originally planned to collaborate with Quinniaug Community College for Spring 2008; however this relationship did not occur and instead we have a MOU with NWCC.

\*\*\* A total of 7 men were recruited. The recruitment effort for men fell short due to the lack of credits for the majority of men who applied.

<b>Statistics of CT WAGE Participants</b>	<b>Fall 2007</b>	<b>Spring 2008</b>	<b>Totals/Averages</b>
Number of Participants	16	23	39
Number of Males	2	5	7
Number of Females	14	18	32
Number of Married Males	1	2	3
Number of Married Females	3	0	3
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Hispanic	32%	17%	23%
African-American	50%	74%	64%
Native American	6%	0%	3%
Caucasian	6%	9%	7%
Other	6%	0%	3%
Average Number of Credits Upon Entering	64	54	58

Number of Former AFDC Recipients	7	11	18
Average Income Upon Entering	\$30,914	\$27,543	Salaries range from \$3,000.00 - \$55,000
Average Number of Children	2	2	From 1-5 Children
Average Age	36	36	From 22 years to 47
Places of Residence			
Bloomfield	0	2	2
Bristol	1	0	1
East Hartford	0	1	1
Hamden	1	2	3
Hartford	6	5	11
Kensington	0	1	1
Ledyard	1	0	1
Meriden	1	1	2
New Haven	2	7	9
Norwalk	1	0	1
Plainville	1	0	1
South Norwalk	0	1	1
South Windsor	1	0	1
Waterbury	1	0	1
Windsor	0	2	2
Winsted	0	1	1
Graduation	3 Associate degree graduates	0	3 Associate degree graduates
Retention Rate	94%	86%	Overall Retention 90%

**Testimony for Charter Oak State College – Shahid Khokhar**  
**Appropriations Committee – Public Hearing**  
**February 13, 2009**

Good evening- Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Shahid Khokhar, and I am a resident of Waterbury. I am honored to be here today to speak about the importance of the CT Wage Program for adults pursuing their degree.

I can still remember vividly, the cold and dry night of December 2, 2007 when I was laid off from my job at a Toyota dealership due to the lack of car sales. It became apparent to me that the economy was taking a plunge and that there were not many jobs available for individuals without a college degree. So, I found a part-time job just to make ends meet. One day, after glancing at my 5 and 7 year old boys and my wife, I knew I had to complete my Bachelor's degree so I could obtain a better paying job which would help fulfill the needs of my young family

Prior to my life taking these unexpected turns, I had completed 85% of my Bachelor's degree at SCSU, got married and eventually was distracted from the completion of my degree. Being laid off and with the need to make more money to support my family, I sought the means to complete my degree. This led me to Charter Oak State College where the supportive staff in the admissions office encouraged me to finish my degree.

However, the real issue of financing my education was still there. I was on the verge of losing my condominium, and was incurring more and more credit card debt. The motivation to finish my degree was already there, but the financial pressure was very strong. I was referred to Paula Silva in the Financial Aid office, who in turn referred me to **Ms. Delores Bell (Coordinator for CT Wage Program)**.

**Miss Bell and the CT Wage Program** was the last piece of the puzzle to the road to finish my Bachelor's degree. The peace of mind that came with the financial support from the program and personal support from Miss Bell, I was able to accelerate my studies by taking eleven classes within a seven month time frame. Not only did the support from the program enable me to finish my Bachelor's degree at a very fast pace but it also gave me the strength, support, and encouragement to finish my degree with a 3.80 GPA, which led to early admission into an MBA program at Southern CT State University.

To sum it all up, the effectiveness of the CT Wage Program can be judged from my situation: seven months ago, the thought of finishing my Bachelor's degree was fading away and my future was looking pretty bleak. Now I am enrolled in a MBA program with concentration in Finance at Southern CT State University. This program has enabled me to see the light at the other end of the tunnel.