

## Youth Funding Testimony

### 1. Bill Putt

Chair of One Stop Committee for the Capital Workforce Partners. Our committee oversees the award and execution of our Adult and Youth training and work contracts. I have been a director of the Capital Workforce Partners in its various forms since the early 1970's. This qualifies me as a person of tremendous endurance.

As a person who built and subsequently sold a public electronics manufacturing business in Connecticut I have been exposed to or actually used most of the employment incentives which are now part of our workforce programs.

I am currently

Executive Director of CCT Telecom Ltd., a Chinese manufacturer of residential telephone equipment sold under the GE brand. In some respects this is the competition which we are up against. We employ approximately 15,000 workers aged 16 – 24.

Member of the MIT Leadership Committee on Public Service which among other activities creates opportunities in the Cambridge Public School system for MIT students to mentor, tutor and lead the building of science projects in the context of the school curriculum

Chairman of the Asylum Hill Learning Zone which provides tutoring and after school science to West Middle school and provides life skills education and counseling to expectant and new mothers.

In these economic times your difficult task is to set the priorities. So the question is where does funding for youth employment initiatives fit?

I have spent most of my service on the Workforce board dealing with adult training issues. What is very difficult to comprehend as an investor and manager is; after expending over \$100,000,000 on job related programs in the past 5 years just in our region, why has unemployment and the demand for services from our constituents not begun to decline, notwithstanding the temporary economic decline we are now in. I have come to believe that it is because we are addressing the wrong end of the cycle. We need to invest more heavily at the front end which is youth. Training and educating adults with barriers is a slow and intensive process.

Tom noted in his testimony that the more a teen works the more likely he or she is to graduate and then to work. We sometimes underestimate the impact of first jobs. Studies of the importance of first jobs after college reflect that good experiences and high expectations by employers lead to greater future achievement. (Professor Ed Shine). These early experiences are very important to later success.

The quality of the job is also important which means we must spend the time necessary to find worksites, evaluate proposals, interview students, establish the necessary educational partnerships to go with the jobs and seek matching funds. This takes time. Scale up is not a one month process. As Tom noted, if we do not receive at least state funds in a timely manner, our execution is difficult and may impact student outcomes even if federal funds are forthcoming.

As we look forward it seems to me that we should be concerned with the competition from other countries and the structure of the workforce which can address our competitors' strengths. My experience in China began in the early eighties which was about 10 years after the arrest of the last of Mao's communist partners including his wife. When you read the history of the trail from full collectivism to the small elements of rural entrepreneurship, it is astounding what can be done with small money and simple elements of entrepreneurship even with no education. Some of these lessons may help our inner cities and have been seen frequently in some immigrant communities. If anything there is not sufficient entrepreneurship amongst our youth and too much a sense that the mountain is too steep. I think that more work experience, team building and a sense of helping others are important elements for our youth to really break the cycle that many of them see. The students which I see from MIT who go to India, Pakistan, Africa or South America for their summers have great interest in helping others with science. The confidence which comes from helping others is crucial for successful entrepreneurship.

In terms of the structure of our workforce we have to be careful about turning our community colleges into remediation institutions. There is no better lesson than finding out early that you are unprepared to perform certain work tasks which makes you realize the value of further education. This is why a number of graduate business schools require work experience prior to admission. Before reaching high school graduation our students need to test their skills in the work world and see where they may be lacking. Not enough students see the connection between doing well academically and work success. Our work population is aging rapidly. We need young skilled workers with higher levels of motivation ready to finish their high school education with distinction and to engage in life long learning. This is why work experience in those last 3 or 4 years of high school is so important. As I said before retraining, remediation and overcoming old barriers is slow and intensive.

In my view the question is do we want what we had before we went into the recession or do we want something different and better. I think we should aim for younger, more entrepreneurial, more prepared for the transition from school to work.