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*Testimony of Representative Christopher Perone of Norwalk
Before the Education Committee on Raised Bill 5368, An Act Concerning No Worker Left Behind*

Senator Handley, Representative Willis, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, I would like to thank you for raising HB 5368, AN ACT CONCERNING NO WORKER LEFT BEHIND.

This past year approximately 100,000 jobs were lost in Connecticut. Studies suggest that job losses in the state will continue into 2012 and perhaps beyond.

This legislative session is likely to be marked by the theme of creating as many job opportunities as possible for our residents. Governor Rell in her State of the State address stressed economic development and job creation as number one priority and I believe there is such consensus among legislative leaders as well.

In an effort to help formulate Connecticut's response to economic challenges in the state, the Majority Leader Denise Merrill convened the Majority Leader's Job Growth Roundtable. I had the privilege of participating in the work of the task-force and was glad that we were able in our legislative recommendations to identify areas where the state could make strategic investments that would change the progressively deteriorating pattern of job losses in the state.

One of the recommendations that came out from the Majority Leader's Job Growth Roundtable is contained in HB 5368. The bill is modeled on the Michigan program of the same name. Since 2007, that program has been remarkably successful with over 64 thousand applicants enrolled.

Provisions for the bill include a \$5,000 per year tuition supplement for two years for individuals who are either unemployed or come from a gross family income of under \$40,000. To ensure that the program is effective, applicants must earn their degree in four years or less or be subject to paying back the tuition waved.

As more and more jobs become knowledge based and require further education beyond what our high schools can offer, we must rise to meet the challenge of a changing economic playing field. Currently 70 percent of the fastest growing jobs require a secondary degree. Connecticut citizens cannot afford to be losing out on these opportunities especially given the current economic climate.

I believe House Bill 5368 is a good investment towards the goal of the restoring our competitive edge. Thank you very much for this opportunity today and I urge the committee's favorable report.