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My name is Marcia Bok and I am submitting testimony today on behalf of the Ct. Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers to oppose proposed cuts to job training and economic development. When jobs are particularly scarce and we should be tooling up for a new economic agenda for Connecticut, it seems particularly ill-advised to consider cutting job training programs and economic development at this time.

For the very poor who may be receiving TANF (or received it in the past), we know that that program, while mandating employment, really did not in the past, nor does it currently, provide ample opportunities for developing job skills. We have talked repeatedly about thinking about welfare as an anti-poverty program. Surely, job training is consistent with that goal.

For the working poor, we are concerned about the lack of upward economic mobility at the present time and, in fact, the decline in wages and benefits. Education has always been, and continues to be, one of the most important, if not the most important avenue, to economic mobility. Job training is also an important avenue to reemployment for people who have lost their jobs.

Job training is particularly important at this time as we tool up for a new economic agenda for Connecticut. We recognize the need for innovation and new technologies for Connecticut to be a leader in economic growth and prosperity. I believe economic development is the cornerstone, not only to job training, but for job creation, as well. How can we achieve these goals and also cut these programs?

And finally, I want to address growing inequality in our State and the nation. We know that we need to increase shared prosperity and increase purchasing power for our people. We need to increase exports. We also talk about the threat to democracy when there is such a huge distance between the super-rich and everyone else. We really cannot continue doing things the same way and going in the same direction. As we chart a new course for Connecticut, I believe that job training and economic development go hand in hand; and that a skilled work force and economic development are central to prosperity for everyone in the State. Thank you for your help in this important matter.