

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE COMMERCE COMMITTEE
February 22, 2012

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Senate Bill No. 24

AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher, Representative Giuliano and other members of the Education Committee. My name is Catherine Smith and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). I appreciate the opportunity to testify in favor of the Governor's recommendations outlined in *Senate Bill No. 24 AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS*.

DECD's mission is to develop and implement strategies that increase the state's economic competitiveness. I am proud to say we have made good progress in fulfilling this mission under Governor Malloy. However, unless we are willing to view economic and educational competitiveness as one issue, I'm afraid, our progress will be short lived.

A strong economy requires a knowledgeable and productive workforce which in turn helps its companies make high-value-added products and services that compete globally. We need to ensure we offer our citizens access to training and education that can develop the requisite skills — skills that are becoming more complex as the knowledge economy grows — that will lead to economic success.

Primary and secondary education is linked to economic development by a mounting body of research. Workers' wages and productivity are directly tied to educational attainment. And education reduces social problems like drug abuse and crime that can hinder economic growth.

For these reasons DECD enthusiastically supports Governor Malloy's Senate Bill 24, which calls for comprehensive reform of the state's education system by expanding early childhood education, allocating funding for new educational approaches, removing red tape, and improving teacher preparation, among other things.

Elements of the bill that DECD has a particular interest in is the primacy it puts on vocational education and worker training. But we are also keenly aware of the need to bring more students through STEM based education. Technology, math and science will be at the center of many of the high growth industries we want to attract and retain in the state. There is no better way to gain these skills than by educating our residents in the best way we can.

Senate Bill 24 allows the State Board of Education to establish and maintain a statewide system of regional vocational-technical schools. The system of schools, the Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS), will be governed by an 11-member board consisting of business experts, educators, and the commissioners of Labor and DECD. The new governing board, which will have more authority and control over policy, will increase accountability and better manage performance measurements.

CTHSS will offer full-time and part-time evening programs in vocational and technological education and training; establish specific achievement goals for students at vo-tech schools at each grade level; and measure the performance of each vo-tech school and identify a set of quantifiable measures to be used. Performance measure will include 10th-grade mastery test scores, trade-related assessment tests, dropout rates, and graduation rates.

The bill also requires the DECD commissioner to report to standing committees with cognizance over matters relating to education, higher education, employment advancement and labor. DECD, through its contact with businesses, can coordinate and improve economic development efforts to utilize the CTHSS in business assistance and other programs.

DECD believes these concepts taken together will increase collaboration and communication among academia, business, and government and strengthen the link between curriculum and business needs — ensuring students in technical programs learn the skills necessary for success in the knowledge-based economy.

I respectfully request the Committee's support for the Governor's proposal.