

State Vocational Federation of Teachers



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Testimony of Brian Bisson, Windham THS
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**S.B. No. 340 (Raised) AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE BY STATE
EMPLOYEES OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY CONNECTICUT TECHNICAL
HIGH SCHOOL SYSTEM STUDENTS**

Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 9, 2012

My name is Brian Bisson, and I am a carpentry instructor at Windham THS. I also graduated from the same Windham Tech carpentry department. My experiences as both a teacher and student have convinced me that there is no better way to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to be an expert carpenter than production work, in which our students go to a job site and build everything from porches to cabinets to additions to entire houses. The range of tasks, the use of math and language skills, the need for problem solving, and the combination of working as a team while still being self-directed cannot be replicated in the shop itself. When I graduated from Windham Tech I was immediately employable. I was able to be successful at the job site because I had been at job sites as part of my trade education.

Currently, State workers cannot have more than \$100 of work done per year, which means that they cannot have jobs done by our students. Our department has had to turn down production requests from people in our community – work that would have been educationally valuable to our students – because the homeowner was a State Trooper or worked for

Department of Transportation. Losing those educational opportunities over the \$100 limit was very disappointing for our department, and the rule seemed arbitrary at best. I am certain there were abuses of production work in the past, but there are levels of financial oversight on every production job, both within the school and from Central Office. The current ethics restriction seems like a protection that is no longer relevant.

Not only do our students lose out on learning opportunities because of this restriction, but our school loses much-needed funding. The rate for labor for our entire department is \$18 per hour. A job that takes 100 hours allows us to buy the supplies and tools our students need in the shop; there is simply no money to provide the necessities for the underclassmen that do not usually go out on production. When our seniors go out on production, not only are they learning in a real-world situation, making them job-ready when they graduate, but they are also helping fund the work the freshmen are doing back in the shop and also helping to fund other students in the non-production shops. Any unnecessary restriction on production work hurts the education of every Carpentry student. I became a carpenter, and then a carpentry teacher, because of the skills and experiences I gained going out on production when I was a student at Windham. I am hoping my students have those same positive experiences. Senate Bill 340 helps make it easier for that to happen.