



CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION FOR ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

March 6, 2012

Testimony on the following bill:

Raised Bill SB 41: AN ACT CONCERNING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Submitted by: Richard Tariff, President, Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education and Director of Adult and Community Education, EASTCONN Regional Education Service Center

*The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education, a statewide professional organization representing providers of mandated adult education.*

Representative Willis, Senator Bye and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Rich Tariff, Director of Adult and Community Education at the EASTCONN regional educational service center, and I'm also the President of CAACE, the Connecticut Association of Adult and Continuing Education. I'm here to support SB 41, an initiative to review the issues of workforce development in the state.

Connecticut's educational and workplace leaders have been made increasingly aware of the challenges of the growing mismatch between worker qualifications required by current and emerging occupations in the state and the overwhelming number of workers who lack the credentials necessary for those occupations. While strengthening the education provided in the K-12 system is essential to solving this skills gap, such efforts will meet less than a third of the demand for qualified workers in the labor market in the next several years. This means that only by addressing the education and training needs of those already in the labor force, many of whom are currently in low-wage, low-skilled jobs, can Connecticut hope to fill the kinds of occupations created by its employers.

We can point to the programs and processes that already exist to aid potential workers with skills development – adult education, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, postsecondary education institutions, CT Works centers, to name some. But given the population we have to target - many of whom lack basic academic skills or the required funds and time to spend away from their current low-paying jobs – we must improve our workforce development system so that it:

- Targets its outreach efforts to improve adult learner awareness of the opportunities that exist and addresses the barriers that block low-wage and low-skilled adult workers;

- Provides a clear pathway of skills development leading to higher level occupations;
- Allows for competency credentials to be gained in smaller units of time than traditional semesters so that the process is flexible and accessible for those with work and family demands;
- Involves employers in all phases of workforce development so that adult learners completing education and training programs finish with clearly defined competencies and industry-recognized credentials linked to employment opportunities and advancement.

Adult education in Connecticut, with its certified teachers trained in basic skills development through contextualized learning, has an extensive history both in responding to workforce needs and in transitioning adult learners to postsecondary education. Strategies for improvement in workforce development begin with a closer collaboration among workforce boards, adult education and higher education to review the policy, program and budget issues confronting the delivery of education and training services directly focused on low-wage and low-skilled workers. An outcome of such collaboration in other states has been the creation of a “stackable credentials” education and training framework that integrates basic academic skills development, non-credit occupational training, and for-credit postsecondary degree and certificate programs that tie directly with occupations in industries with high unmet employment needs. The structures needed for workforce development enhancement include:

- Support services for low-income adults to access education and training programs and achieve stable employment and family-supporting wages;
- Bridge curricula that provide smooth transitions between basic education, occupational training and postsecondary certificate and degree programs;
- A state-level integrated data capability to follow participant progress and outcomes across education and employment programs.

Models for this proposal exist in the FastTRAC initiatives in places such as Minnesota, Ohio and Kentucky, and parts of this testimony cite the descriptions of their work directly. These initiatives have capitalized on the flexibility and applied curriculum know-how of adult basic education, working in concert with employers and postsecondary educators, to address workforce development needs.

Much of the spade work for this transformation of our efforts has been done and should be studied further. Given the urgency of our state’s long-term education and employment problems, we should not delay the important work we have to do.

I will be happy to respond to your questions on this matter.