



Human Services Committee

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SB 209 An Act Increasing Educational Incentives for Jobs First Participants

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My name is Amy Miller and I am the Associate Director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the personal and professional lives of women, girls and their families. For two decades, CWEALF has evaluated and researched workforce issues and Connecticut's education and training system. Based on the evaluations we have conducted we have provided feedback and recommendations to the CT Department of Labor about the effectiveness of their strategies helping people move from welfare to work. I am writing today in support of SB 209 An Act Increasing Educational Incentives for Jobs First Participants.

As Connecticut has implemented new programs and designed different strategies to move the welfare population into self-sufficiency, by necessity, the system has to be flexible in its approach. This bill expands the range of tools available to maintain that flexibility and provide more opportunities for participants to increase their skills and employability.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (*Digest of Education Statistics, 2009*), adults without a high school diploma had unemployment rates of 14.8%. For individuals who had finished high school, that number drops to 9.7% and to 6.4% with an associate's degree.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistic, (BLS News Release, January 24, 2012, usual weekly earnings for the 3rd and 4th quarter) full-time workers age 25 and over without a high school diploma had median weekly earnings of \$444, compared with \$641 for high school graduates (no college) and \$1,158 for those holding at least a bachelor's degree. Women with high documented literacy are 94 percent more likely than women with low documented literacy to make between \$650 and \$1,149 per week and 353 percent more likely to make between \$1,150 and \$1,949 per week (Institute for Women's Policy Research, *Low Literacy Means Lower Earnings, Especially for Women*, February 2012).

Not only are persons with higher educational attainment more likely to be active in the labor market, they are more likely to have jobs that pay above the poverty level, have health benefits, and more job security. At least one-third of Connecticut's Jobs First participants have not completed high school (CTDOL, *At A Squint*, November 2011).

This summer the CT DOL formed a workgroup, on which CWEALF was a member, to make recommendations on how to expedite preparing individuals to develop appropriate occupational skills to move them into high need industry jobs. Essentially the group reviewed best practices from around the country and identified aspects that were vital to a successful program in Connecticut. This pilot contextualizes learning for the 1000 adults for whom the project would work. Research shows that for adults in particular, contextualized learning can increase educational gains exponentially while preparing people for jobs.

Without investments in the educational and occupational skills of welfare recipients and other low income adults, we will continue to miss the opportunity to provide Connecticut employers with skilled workers. For those clients who have gone to work but have not secured employment at a living wage,

we must invest in pathways to lifelong learning and skill building. The workforce development system requires investments in education and training options like those proposed in this pilot. In addition, these pilots can demonstrate what is needed to assist low income individuals as they transition to college and higher degree programs.

Reports in Connecticut have shown that businesses across our state need workers with basic skills in reading and math, transferable skills such as problem-solving, team work and decision-making and specific occupational skills which meet the technical needs of industry. Without a multi-pronged approach including job readiness training, basic skill and language instruction and work supports, we will not address the needs of JFES recipients or businesses in the state. The pilot project offered in this bill helps to address this issue. Therefore, I urge you to support SB 209.