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**Testimony before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Re. 6502, 6430 and 904**

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Submitted by Liz Dupont-Diehl, Policy Director, Connecticut Association for Human Services
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Good afternoon, Senator Bye and Representative Willis, and members of the committee. My name is Liz Dupont-Diehl and I am the Policy Director for the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS seeks to end poverty and empower all families to build a secure economic future. CAHS produces research and analysis on child poverty and other issues as needed to drive advocacy, and we work to create fair opportunity for economic success for all families. CAHS also operates a number of programs to help people become self-sufficient, such as the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, financial literacy classes and helping people connect with eligible benefits to help them access health care, meet basic needs and become self-sufficient.

I am here to address bills 6502 and to touch on 6430 and 904. The first would allow adults with a high school diploma to use the Adult Education System as college preparation, and the others would, in part, establish councils and working groups to design and develop contextualized learning opportunities and career pathways.

We want to support the intent of all these bills but urge caution in implementation, and say also that resources will be needed for these programs to succeed and prepare workers effectively for jobs.

As advocates devoted to Family Economic Success, CAHS sees a lot to be concerned about lately. We reported this month that the number of working poor families in Connecticut – that is, earning 200% or less of poverty, or \$45,622 for a family of four – rose 5% since 2007. Now, 21% of our 389,000 **working** families are low-income. We all know education correlates to income. Connecticut has 597,350 adults aged 16-64 who do not have a high school diploma or equivalency, and the state's adult

Ed system served some 24,000 students in 2010-2011. We support collaboration between the adult education and community college systems, believing they have much to learn from each other, but we do not support adding more students to the Adult Education system without careful analysis and additional resources as needed to handle them.

We also want to reference the 2009 Adult Literacy Leadership Board Strategic Plan as an excellent analysis of our workforce and adult education and literacy systems and echo its call for **coordinated leadership amongst the Adult Education, Workforce Investment and Higher Educational systems**. Much of this is occurring and it should be supported and reinforced.

We applaud the goals stated in bills before you that would articulate pathways between adult education, higher education and the workforce investment system. These systems are serving many of the same people and it is imperative that they share best and local knowledge about emerging jobs, employer needs and required training and education. This critical information must be consistently communicated to adult students as “pathways” that are clear and articulated.

CAHS has testified to you before about the current outcomes for the many adult learners who enter the community college system and don’t progress beyond developmental education. Reforms underway have prompted a welcome and thorough analysis of student need and achievement and also spurred coordination of the three systems mentioned. We need to continue this work and keep the focus on **access to education for all adult learners**, and continue to design a system that clearly connects higher education and workforce investment to adult education.

Finally, we want to issue a call for a publicly accessible reform process, and for data and analysis of these systems, programs and outcomes. We know that working adult students are often juggling jobs and family and need support in order to succeed academically. In the words of one provider: “Life Happens.” We need to offer supports, coordinate with other community resources, and track and report on what is working, and this information must be accessible to the public as well as to those working on reforms.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony .

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