Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
RB 5362 An Act Targeting State Financial Aid to Support Technical Training; RB 5495 An Act Establishing An Accelerated Certificates Program; and RB 5493 An Act Requiring a Statewide Plan to Provide Education, Training and Job Placement in Emerging Industries
Alice Pritchard, Executive Director, Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund
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My name is Alice Pritchard and I am Executive Director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. For decades we have advocated for strategies to increase access for girls and women to post-secondary education opportunities that pay a living wage. Today, I am here on behalf of the Campaign for a Working Connecticut.
The Campaign's mission is to promote the state's economic competitiveness through the development of sustainable, effective workforce solutions to increase workers' skills and advance families to self-sufficiency. The Campaign is a unique and diverse state-wide coalition, which includes members consisting of education and training providers, workforce investment boards, advocates, unions and chambers of commerce.

The Campaign urges your support of *RB 5362 An Act Targeting State Financial Aid to Support Technical Training and RB 5495 An Act Establishing An Accelerated Certificates Program.*

Obtaining a high school diploma was once a guarantee that an individual had the skills and credentials required to get a steady job with decent pay, but this is no longer the case. Vocational training and post-secondary education are becoming increasingly important for securing employment that provides self sufficient wages. In fact, a growing number of jobs in Connecticut require postsecondary education. Sixty six percent (66%) of jobs created by 2018 will require at least some post-secondary education.[1] Without basic skills such as reading, math and English proficiency, jobs with high wages, health benefits and room for advancement can be out of reach for Connecticut's residents.

But not all jobs that require post-secondary education require a four-year degree. These jobs, often referred to as "middle-skill" jobs, require training beyond high school, but not a four-year degree, including an associate's degree, occupational certification, or an apprenticeship. In Connecticut in 2008, it was determined that 45% of jobs were middle-skills. However, only 37% of workers had those skills creating a significant middle-skills gap. In a survey of Connecticut employers, 66% said they have difficulty finding qualified workers in their industry, particularly middle skill workers.

And this isn't just a momentary situation. 245,000 openings in the "middle-skill" job market are projected for the state by 2016. While the openings signal new opportunities for Connecticut's workforce to help the state

promote economic recovery, the growing concern is that there will not be an adequate number of skilled Connecticut workers to fill these positions.

RB 5362 would allow eligible individuals to receive state financial and apply it toward non-degree courses and/or certificate programs at community colleges which lead to an industry recognized credential and current job openings. This bill addresses a gap in the current funding available to those who are taking their first step onto career pathways.

Currently individuals seeking non-degree technical training cannot receive financial aid even if they would otherwise qualify. While the cost of receiving a certificate or taking non-degree courses is often cheaper than enrolling in degree coursework, it is still a significant investment. For example, a one-year manufacturing certificate program costs $7,050 at Asnuntuck Community College. To receive a phlebotomy certificate, the cost is approximately $1,400. These are short-term programs (4 months) that have a high demand increasing the likelihood of the person quickly making a return on investment by contributing to the local economy.

Over the next decade - due to retirement and projected education attainment - the proportion of low-skilled workers in Connecticut's workforce is likely to increase at the same time that the percentage of middle-skill workers is projected to decline. This means the gap will only become deeper if something is not done about it. As a result we are likely to see grave shortages in critical occupations, significantly limiting CT's potential for economic competitiveness.

Connecticut must ensure that its workforce has the necessary education and training to meet not just current but future labor demands. When we talk of "future labor demands," policymakers tend to go straight to K-12 or high school to college conversations. Though these are important discussions, we need to take a hard look at the data on "who is CT's workforce of the future." It turns out – based on population tables –that about two-thirds of the workforce of 2020 is already in the workforce today--long past the traditional high-school to college pipeline.

If we are to realize CT's full economic potential, educational access must reflect the demands of a 21st-century economy and the realities of the 21st-century workforce. A four-year degree is not the only ticket to a stable economic future in Connecticut. RB 5362's emphasis on non-degree courses, certificates and credentials recognizes the importance of a range of training opportunities.

In addition, RB 5495 which would establish accelerated certificates could focus on occupations in demands in the healthcare, manufacturing, and other high demand fields. It will be important that these accelerated programs are supported by the state financial aid called for in RB 5362 if not eligible for federal grants. RB 5362 and 5495 can help to support both individuals interested in pursuing training and employers looking for qualified staff.

RB 5493 An Act Requiring a Statewide Plan to Provide Education, Training and Job Placement in Emerging Industries

Connecticut is profoundly affected by the gap in adult literacy. According to the 2012 American Community Survey, 10% of Connecticut residents over the age of 25 do not possess a high school diploma or equivalent certification.[ii] Additionally, 20% of Connecticut's population does not have the literacy skills necessary to succeed in the 21st century workforce. Most impacted by this epidemic are the urban areas of Connecticut. The city of Hartford, for example, maintains a 65 to 70% illiteracy rate among its population.[iii] The literacy struggle in urban areas may be attributed in part to language barriers, due to the fact that 47% of Hartford residents speak a language other than English at home and 21% identify as speaking English "less than very well". [iv]

In addition to adult illiteracy, studies demonstrate a correlation between the education gap and securing employment.[v] The unemployment rate for people in Connecticut with less than a high school diploma was 23.8%; for people with a high school diploma it was 10.2%.Both of these rates are significantly higher than for those with some postsecondary education (9%) or a bachelors' degree (4.4%).[vi]

Reports in Connecticut indicate that businesses across the state need workers with basic skills in reading and math, as well as transferable skills. These skills include problem-solving, team work, decision-making, and specific occupational skills. Based on the status of adult literacy and education within the state, Connecticut employers feel that skills necessary for occupations within their field are not being met by the potential workforce. In the absence of workers with job-ready skills, positions go unfilled. Furthermore, small businesses, which drive our economy, cannot find the workers needed and do not have the resources to hire and train people to fill these positions.

Educational experts have identified teaching in context, also known as contextualized learning, as an effective strategy to accelerate a student's path from education to employment. Defined as "the concept of relating subject matter content to meaningful situations that are relevant to students' lives", the purpose of these strategies is to help a student learn or improve their basic skills while also teaching the technical skills to prepare them for employment. Two contextualized learning strategies commonly used are contextualized basic skills instruction and integrated education and training. The most well-known examples of the integrated education and training strategy is Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Program.

Efforts have been made to advance contextualized learning throughout Connecticut. In Fiscal Year 2012-2013, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) invested $240,000 in federal Program Improvement Project (PIP) grants specifically to implement I-BEST programs.[vii] In addition, the Connecticut Department of Labor is administering nearly $3 million in state funding to pilot I-BEST programs with participants in the Jobs First Employment Services Program (JFES) through the Workforce Investment Boards. Implemented by adult education providers and community colleges, training in customer service/retail, manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality, construction, automotive and information technology is available for mandated participants in the JFES program and adult education students without a high school diploma.

This strategy is showing promise and we are eager to expand this educational opportunity beyond the target population of welfare recipients. Many of individuals who utilize the services of the CT Works One Stop Career Centers are similar to the JFES population but ineligible for the training because they are not recipients. Several WIBs are operating contextualized learning programs through federal and private grants to serve these broader populations.

Our 2014 legislative agenda calls for $2.5 million in additional resources and a broadening of the target population to anyone who does not have the skills to enter college or find employment. This investment would greatly increase the WIBs ability to prepare the unemployed for occupations in demand. In the event these resources are allocated, we support the bill's recommendation for a statewide plan for implementing and expanding and/or improving current contextualized learning programs including outlining strategies for utilizing state, federal and private resources to sustain and replicate this promising practice in the future.

I have attached proposed language which I urge you to adopt rather than the current language of RB 5493. Though early college high school and middle college programs are important topics, I urge you to focus in this bill solely on contextualized learning for adults. Without investments in the educational and occupational skills of low income adults, we will continue to miss the opportunity to provide Connecticut employers with skilled workers. Contextualized learning is one promising strategy that can help us to meet this demand—it is time to expand programs statewide and serve more adults ready to take their first major step on a career pathway.

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters.

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[i] *The Basic Economic Security Tables for Connecticut*, Wider Opportunities for Women, 2012

[ii] U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey. (2012).*Elected social characteristics in the United States more information 2012 American community survey 1-year estimates.* Retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk

[iii] Hartford Public Library. (2013). *Capital region adult literacy partnership.* Retrieved from http://www.urbanlibraries.org/capital-region-adult-literacy-partnership-innovation-344.php?page_id=96

[iv] U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey. (2012).*Elected social characteristics in the United States more information 2012 American community survey 1-year estimates.* Retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk

[v] *Education, Job Openings, and Unemployment in Metropolitan America.* Rothwell. Jonathan. Brookings. August 2012.

[vi] *CT Department of Labor December 2013 presentation to CT Employment and Training Commission.*

[vii] Connecticut Employment and Training Commission. Career Advancement Committee. (2013). *A review of contextualized learning and its importance to career advancement for adults in Connecticut: a report to the ct employment and training commission*

Alternate Language RB 5493

Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2014*) (a) For purposes of this section: (1) "Contextualized learning *"is the concept of relating subject matter content to meaningful situations that are relevant to students' lives*. The purpose of these strategies is to help a student learn or improve their basic skills while also teaching the technical skills to prepare them for employment. Two contextualized learning strategies commonly used are contextualized basic skills instruction and integrated education and training. The most well-known examples of the integrated education and training strategy is Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Program.

The state shall make available in the FY2015 budget $2,500,000 in new funds for contextualized learning including IBEST programs, and career pathway programs. The resources shall be administered by the State Department of Labor and implemented through the five regional Workforce Investment Boards that includes Capital Workforce Partners,
Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board, The Workforce Alliance, and The Workplace, Inc. Within 60 days of state budget adoption, the State Department of Labor shall execute contracts with the five regional Workforce Investment Boards to implement programs in collaboration with the state's adult education providers and regional community technical colleges.

Annually the Workforce Investment Boards shall report, through the State Department of Labor, on the implementation of programs funded with these state resources, including but not limited to numbers served, types of education and training offered, job placement and job retention to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to higher education and employment advancement.

Connecticut's Workforce Investment Boards shall develop a *contextualized learning and career pathways plan* to implement, evaluate, scale up and improve upon the programs funded under this legislation as well as existing state and other contextualized learning pilot programs and career pathway programs that foster placement in jobs available in the manufacturing, health care, construction and green industries and other emerging sectors of the state's economy. Such a plan shall include identification of federal, private and philanthropic dollars that can be

allocated to match the state's support for contextualized learning and career pathway programs and metrics for evaluating future program effectiveness. A planning grant of $100,000 shall be committed to the five Workforce Investment Boards' for the completion of their plan.