



Testimony on RB 5493 *An Act Requiring a Statewide Plan to Provide Education, Training and Job Placement in Emerging Occupations*

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Submitted by: William Villano, The Connecticut Workforce Development Council

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Good afternoon. My name is William Villano and I am President and CEO of the Workforce Alliance, the South Central Workforce Investment Board. I am here today on behalf of the Connecticut Workforce Development Council (CWDC) in support of the planning and implementation of contextualized learning called for in RB 5493.

The CWDC, comprised of the state's five Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), leads a coordinated statewide workforce development system which strives to meet the current and future needs of the state's businesses by building a competitive workforce through education, training and job readiness opportunities.

Connecticut's Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) have a track record of performance and innovation in serving the people and the businesses of the state. We are the state's best resource to:

- Address the job readiness and training needs of the long term and newly unemployed
- Help employers match their job openings today and in the future to qualified candidates
- Connect youth to career pathways and work experiences that will sustain our state's competitiveness.

In an effort to support a skilled workforce, we implement programs serving youth, unemployed adults, and dislocated and incumbent workers. Our legislative agenda (see attached) highlights a number of current activities we are engaged in which require continued or increased state support.

The Connecticut Department of Labor estimates that 48% of our state's labor market consists of middle-skilled jobs, including such occupations as nurses, automotive mechanics, general maintenance and repair workers, and carpenters; however, only 40% of our state's workers are likely to have the necessary training for these jobs. And in the future with the demographic changes this situation will worsen. Middle skill jobs are those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree.

One strategy we are employing to address this skills gap is contextualized learning. 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. We are currently implementing I-Best programming statewide for the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) participants with state general fund resources administered by the CT Department of Labor. In partnership with adult education providers and community colleges, the WIBs are supporting training in customer service/retail, manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality, construction, automotive and information technology for mandated participants in the JFES program.

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 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.

The CT Workforce Development Council looks forward to the opportunity to continue to partner with state legislature to promote economic growth for our state. We urge your passage of legislation to support investment in contextualized learning programs across the state.

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On behalf of the CT Workforce Development Council, contact William Villano, Director of the Workforce Alliance at 203-624-4030 or [wvillano@workforcealliance.biz](mailto:wvillano@workforcealliance.biz)