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Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Senate Bill 1084 and House Bill 7007

Good afternoon, Sen. Bartolomeo, Rep. Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

My name is Ren Brockmeyer and I am a Policy Analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy work at the Capitol and program work in low-income communities.

Raised Bill 7007, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the planning Commission for Higher Education, calls for increasing the postsecondary education levels so that at least 40% of the adult population have a bachelor degree and 30% have an associate's or sub-baccalaureate certificate. This will work to ensure a workforce that can achieve and sustain a competitive economy.

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems' (CHEMS) Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education in Connecticut determined that our population is not educated enough to meet future workforce needs. In 2012, 47.5% of our population had an Associates degree or higher. Fifty-six percent had at least a certificate. Workforce projections indicate that by 2025 Connecticut's economy will require a workforce in which 70% will have some postsecondary education. This requires 300,000 more graduates than are currently produced. NCHEMS projected that doing nothing to promote a more skilled workforce will result in producing 23,000 fewer graduates due to a projected decline in students completing high school.

To meet this goal, Connecticut must increase adult population enrollment in postsecondary education. Preparing adults to meet the challenges of postsecondary education is an essential part of this strategy. The current developmental education transitions programs can be an integral part of this goal and become a pipeline for community colleges to increase adults successfully completing postsecondary education.

Our adult population is an untapped resource in Connecticut. NCHEMS noted that Connecticut enrolls adults at a lower rate than all but five other states: South Carolina, Louisiana, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania. Growing the transitions programs is a step towards improving this rating.

Increasing our skilled workforce benefits families, while improving Connecticut's revenue as well. Higher earning power generates higher tax revenues, through income, sales, and other discretionary spending. Increasing our skilled workforce increases wages and reduces the dependence on safety net programs. Increasing our skilled workforce provides industry with an incentive to expand production and output in Connecticut. Reducing socioeconomic disparities and reducing the achievement gap between whites and minorities is a goal stated in Sect. 1 of HB 7007. NCHEMS states that the populations of Connecticut's core cities are particularly disadvantaged in regards to levels of educational attainment. Our "core cities" represent the greatest income and education disparity, and they have high minority populations. The transitional remediation programs can reach this population and work to achieve the goals stated in Sect. 1 of HB 7007.

Senate Bill 1084, An Act Concerning Certificate Programs at the Regional Community Technical Colleges, is also an essential part of meeting the Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education. NCHEMS identified significant mismatches between workforce needs and degree production, especially in the fields at the sub-baccalaureate level. Community Technical colleges, in partnership with regional industries, can create sub-baccalaureate programs, such as credit-bearing certificate-level courses, that become the means to earning a living wage and to providing a pathway for further education. Such partnerships can be an on-going endeavor as employers grow their companies and their skills needs, and community technical colleges upgrade their programs to meet these progressive needs.

In NCHEMS' commentary on achieving the 70% post secondary goal for 2025, 55% were at the baccalaureate level, 19% at the associates, and 26% at the certificate level. This represents an additional 860 certificates per year, aligned with industry needs in Connecticut to meet future workforce needs. The transitional remediation programs can be a pipeline to certification programs by utilizing contextualized learning strategies to motivate adult students to enroll and complete credit bearing certificate programs and have the flexibility to lead to further postsecondary education as stackable credentials.

Both Senate Bill 1084 and House Bill 7007 can greatly improve access to post secondary education in Connecticut. There is a ready population of adults who want and need the opportunity to secure a better quality of life. Please consider the value and importance of the Transitional Remediation Programs as pipelines to achieving the goals in these bills.

Thank you for your time.