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Appropriations Committee Higher Education Sub-Committee, Board of Regents for Higher Education

Good Evening, Sen. Bartolomeo, Rep. Willis and members of the Higher Education Sub-Committee.

My name is Ren Brockmeyer and I am from the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS works to eliminate poverty through opportunities for economic success. A key opportunity to economic success is post-secondary education. My testimony tonight is for your continued support of the Developmental Education Reform program through the partnerships between community colleges and adult education providers. The object of this partnership is not just to provide remediation, but to increase the number of students requiring remediation to successfully complete and go on to graduate.

Many students in this remedial target population are adults with a high school diploma or GED, working in low skill, low wage employment trying to support their families. According to data from the American Community Survey from 2009 – 2013, 37% of households in Connecticut headed by adults aged 22 – 45 with high school diplomas or GEDs live below 200% of poverty. This translates to about 44,500 families, not individuals, families. The 37% of households at less than 200% of poverty counts children and families among those affected by low wage earnings and opportunity.

The conventional approach to remediation has discouraged students enrolled due to the length of time required to complete and, more importantly, the lack of funds to extend their learning needs. According to data from Complete College, only 9.5% of students entering remedial education graduate in three years. Twenty-two percent complete remedial education and the college courses associated with remediation. Sixty-two percent of these students complete remedial courses but go no further. They paid for these courses and have nothing. The mandate from PA 12-40 required colleges and community colleges to re-think and re-structure the remedial education models of the past. This is where we are at today.

This past fall, Transition Programs started by community colleges with adult education providers rolled out with more planned for this spring. This is an important partnership combining the resources of education professionals: the adult education professionals experienced in working with adults with low literacy levels and other barriers, and the community college faculty who provide the alignment of skill development to certificate and degree attainment.

As with any new program or change effort, it takes time to grow and strengthen this initiative. The program is not perfect, but it is moving in the right direction. As an educational program, it provides opportunities for a population that will strengthen the workforce in Connecticut. This program also provides the community colleges the opportunity to re-focus their goals on educating and improving their graduation rates. This program can be a valuable pipeline for community colleges as better-prepared students enroll are capable of successful completion.

Reforming remedial education at the community college level is an important piece of Connecticut's economic future. As an investment, it will return economic growth in Connecticut with a skilled and educated workforce.