



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
COMMERCE COMMITTEE
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
March 1, 2016**

My name is Jennifer Herz and I am Assistant Counsel for the Connecticut Business & Industry Association (CBIA). CBIA has been representing Connecticut's employers for 200 years and today is proud to say the vast majority of our members are small companies employing less than 50 people.

CBIA supports the concepts in HB 5423 An Act Encouraging Middle School and High School Students to Consider Careers in Manufacturing.

Connecticut's manufacturers play a vital role in our economy: there are nearly 4,500 manufacturing firms that employ 10% of all nonfarm jobs in the state.¹ And, driving home the need to engage young students, manufacturers are expecting to grow their workforce in the coming years. The 2014 Survey of Connecticut's Manufacturing Needs estimated 9,300 manufacturing job openings at the end of last year.² The need for skilled workers is significant. Therefore, engaging Connecticut students in this career track is essential. Connecticut is known for its highly skilled workforce and taking immediate steps to ensure its continued success in manufacturing is vital to our success.

This bill is a good opportunity to address these workforce challenges. CBIA supports efforts to fill this talent pipeline. This issue was raised at the initial Manufacturing Caucus meeting earlier this session. The challenge is to find the most efficient means to accomplish our shared goals.

The committee in Section 1(a) may provide a good opportunity for a diverse range of stakeholders to coordinate outreach to middle and high school students. CBIA respectfully suggests that the committee include middle and high school teachers as well as administration since those individuals lead the group we are focused on engaging. Further, it may be helpful to have the committee makeup specify that manufacturing companies as well as industry groups representing manufacturers are included. Not only will manufactures provide useful feedback but this will also pave an avenue to support employer engagement in the recruitment process.

Section 1(d) of the bill addresses the types of programs the Commissioner of Education will undertake to engage students. While the workgroup established by this bill will certainly be helpful in providing feedback on types of engagement, many agree that hands-on approaches are successful. It is important that we find exciting ways to introduce students to manufacturing that capture their imagination and create excitement. For example, providing students with the opportunity to, safely and

¹ 2014 Survey of Connecticut Manufacturing Workforce Needs:

<http://www.cbia.com/resources/economy/reports-surveys/2014-survey-of-connecticut-manufacturing-workforce-needs/>

² http://www5.cbia.com/newsroom/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/MFG-Workforce_14.pdf?cldee=YnVkZGpAY2JpYS5jb20%3d&utm_source=ClickDimensions&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=CD_NEWSROOM (See page 4)



with supervision, utilize equipment and see demonstrations of real-life applications tend to spark interest. Some legislative barriers could be removed to provide the opportunity for more internship and engaged tours of manufacturing facilities for younger students. While some positive changes were adopted last year to remove employer liability for certain interns, the exemption should be expanded to all employers to support their involvement with student recruitment efforts. (See PA 15-215, Section 10).

Furthermore, it is essential to engage parents in outreach to students. Too often manufacturing is stuck with its decade's old stigma that it is a dirty job that does not allow for career advancement. Today's manufacturing jobs pay well, with good benefits, in clean facilities and encourage career advancement.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments.