



President Mary Ellen Jukowski, Three Rivers Community College and
President Carlee Drummer, Quinebaug Valley Community College

Testimony before the Commerce Committee

Thursday, March 9, 2016

**S.B. No. 398 AN ACT REQUIRING A STUDY OF CERTAIN EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION IN
EASTERN CONNECTICUT**

Senator Hartley, Representative Perone, Senator Frantz, Representative Camillo, and members of the Commerce Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of SB 398 An Act Requiring a Study of Certain Employment Transition in Eastern Connecticut. My name is Dr. Mary Ellen Jukoski, President of Three Rivers Community College, and I am joined by my colleague Dr. Carlee Drummer, President of Quinebaug Valley Community College.

As the Presidents of Connecticut's two Eastern Connecticut Community Colleges, we are keenly aware of the challenges facing both students and employers in our region. Students who attend our colleges are usually living and working locally and expect to stay in the region if they can find gainful employment in fields of interest. However, many of them experience barriers to education, including the need for developmental education or financial assistance to support enrollment, support services such as transportation and childcare assistance, as well as academic supports such as tutoring and career counseling. Though we are challenged by the financial situation facing the state, we work diligently to provide students with the help they need to succeed in our programs.

Our colleges are also working closely with area employers, particularly in healthcare and manufacturing, to address their workforce needs. For instance, we are active in the Eastern CT Advanced Manufacturing Alliance (EAMA), led by the Eastern Workforce Investment Board, and we are partnering with Electric Boat to train and employ individuals for key openings. Through the Advanced Manufacturing Technology Centers, our colleges are training students for careers in sheet metal working, welding, lean manufacturing, supply chain management, machine technology, metrology, and mechatronics.

Electric Boat is also the lead industry partner in our Early College Opportunity (CT ECO) programs at New London and Windham High Schools that offer students the unique opportunity to earn an industry-recognized, two-year post-secondary degree along with their high school diploma.

We are also working closely with health care providers such as Day Kimble and Backus Hospitals that are hiring a range of employees from entry level through professionals, many of whom start their education with our institutions. Our colleges offer a range of programs including nursing, certified nursing assistant, medical assisting, medical billing, health information management, medical office skills, pharmacy technicians, and phlebotomy, and currently have approximately 700 students on the two campuses enrolled in these certificate and associate degree programs. Employer surveys consistently provide feedback that program graduates are prepared for their current workforce needs.

However, the impact of continued job losses at the region's casinos will pose new challenges for our colleges. We anticipate additional demand for courses and services at a time of diminishing resources. In particular, we are concerned that the skills of the former casino workers and others in the community affected by the downsizing will not be a good match for job openings in the region and will require significant education and training to meet those demands. It will be imperative that we have as much information as possible to address this regional challenge in the most efficient way possible.

SB 398 calls for an important report to be completed by the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development to include an assessment of the impact of the job losses on the region, and an examination of the industry clusters with job openings well suited to those affected by the downsizing in the casino industry.

Armed with this information, Quinebaug and Three Rivers Community Colleges would welcome the opportunity to be engaged with other stakeholders in the additional report components, including identifying the training and existing resources needed that would assist these job seekers and to make recommendations for additional training resources. Together we can chart a new path for our region's workforce and employers with support from the state.

We urge your support of SB 398 and thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to you today.