

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
FEBRUARY 18, 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 submits this testimony in support of the concepts in the following bills:

- **HB 5071 An Act Requiring Connecticut to Participate in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement Regarding Distance Learning Programs**
- **HB 5072 An Act Concerning Higher Education Certificate Programs**
- **SB 24 An Act Concerning Program Approval for Independent Institutions of Higher Education**

CBIA supports these bills because it is essential that Connecticut offers accessible, high quality education opportunities for its residents. As you know, Connecticut employers – and in particular manufacturers – are facing a skills gap and consequently a significant need for training. CBIA's 2014 Survey of Connecticut Manufacturing Workforce Needs demonstrated the need for specific types of jobs as well as the type of training¹. The bottom line – the need is significant.

These bills offer Connecticut residents more opportunities to get the necessary training to enter and advance in highly skilled and well paying positions.

Distance learning programs offer flexible opportunities especially for incumbent workers to advance their careers. In particular, distance learning programs benefit the key demographic of 25-64 year olds. By 2020 it is projected by the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce that 70% of all jobs in Connecticut will require post-secondary education (a minimum of a certificate). Since the state's population of 18 year-old students is declining, the 25-64 year old demographic represents the best way to meet this need. This cohort requires flexible, convenient programs since they are typically already working and/or have family obligations. HB 5071 will help ensure that such programs offer quality education opportunities.

Certain aspects of HB 5072, specifically establishing consistency and well-known standards through certificate programs is key for employers to understand the specific skills certificate program graduates bring to the table. Currently, it is challenging for employers to know the skills that come with any given

¹ <http://www.cbiam.com/resources/economy/reports-surveys/2014-survey-of-connecticut-manufacturing-workforce-needs/>

certificate because there is a lack of consistency and established standards. Incorporating industry recognized national credentials into the certificate programs will support consistency and allow manufactures to understand the specific skills graduates are offering.

Finally, permitting independent colleges to respond quickly to the workforce needs of Connecticut's employers is another important change. SB 24 gives our states independent colleges the flexibility to respond to the needs of Connecticut's employers. Connecticut's employers require highly skilled workers and a workforce that can continue to attain new skills. Equally important is the ability to train new and incumbent workers quickly. This bill meets both of those needs.

CBIA has been very supportive of the Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education in Connecticut (the, Plan)². That plan demonstrates the necessity for these bills by showing the training needs in Connecticut. The Plan discusses the great need for certificate programs, for quicker program approval and to offer training opportunities to incumbent workers.

Therefore, CBIA urges your support of HB 5071, HB 5072 and SB 24.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit CBIA's comments.

² <http://www2.cbia.com/govaff//pdf/2015/highereducationcommission.pdf>