



Jennifer Alexander, ConnCAN
Regarding
Senate Bill 837, An Act Concerning Apprenticeship Opportunities for
High Growth, High Demand Jobs

Co-Chairs Representative Haddad, Senators Linares and Bye, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Jennifer Alexander, I am the CEO of ConnCAN, a statewide non-profit organization that has spent the last decade fighting to ensure that all kids in Connecticut have access to a great public education.

I am here to testify in support of *Senate Bill 837, An Act Concerning Apprenticeship Opportunities For High Growth, High Demand Jobs*. This bill comes before you at a time when, as we all know, our economy and demographics are changing rapidly. To ensure a bright future for our children and our state, we'll need to make sure our students have the knowledge and skills they'll need to compete and that Connecticut's employers have enough skilled workers. Senate Bill 837 is an encouraging step in this direction.

By 2020, 70 percent of jobs in Connecticut will require education beyond high school and 65 percent of children entering primary school will ultimately end up working in jobs that do not even exist today. However, as fast as technology and our demographics are changing, the quality of our education is not. Far too many of our students are graduating unprepared for the challenging workforce ahead, especially children of color and children in poverty. Nearly half of Connecticut's 2011 graduating cohort, and more than 62.5 percent of minority, low-income and ELL students enrolled in at least one remedial course in college.

Given this reality, we need for a dependable and systematic information on high growth, high wage jobs in our state, details on the skills and educational requirements for those

jobs, and regular reporting on how well we are preparing students to meet those qualifications. Students, families, the public and decision makers need this information to drive decision-making to ensure that our students and our state will be ready to thrive. The task force proposed in this bill, composed of industry and higher education leaders, would generate this much-needed information. We support this effort and encourage this Committee to consider amending the bill to include a requirement that the task force look at two tiers of jobs: those meeting a living wage for an average family and those meeting a living wage for an individual.

The bill would also begin the process of creating an apprenticeship model similar to the rigorous models used in other countries, like Switzerland, and to models just starting in the U.S. in states like Colorado and Georgia. These public-private models offer students rigorous pathways to industry certifications and good jobs. We need such a program here.

If we are not properly preparing our students for the challenges ahead - be it college or workforce - we are doing them and our state a disservice. Each and every one of these students are our future, it is our job to ensure that they are equipped with the tools in order to be successful. We urge you to pass Senate Bill 837.

Thank you.