



Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
S.B. 837: *An Act Concerning Apprenticeship Opportunities For High Growth, High Demand Jobs*

Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. For decades, CWEALF has been a vocal advocate for policies that increase access for women and girls to post-secondary education and training opportunities that pay a living wage.

CWEALF leads the Campaign for a Working Connecticut (CWCT), a statewide coalition of education and training providers, workforce investment boards and advocates whose mission is to promote the state's economic competitiveness through the development of sustainable, effective workplace solutions to increase workers' skills and advance families to self-sufficiency.

CWEALF and the CWCT supports the concept of S.B. 837: *An Act Concerning Apprenticeship Opportunities for High Growth, High Demand Jobs* with some suggestions.

A high school diploma was once a guarantee that an individual had the skills and credentials required to obtain a steady job with decent pay. In today's workforce, however, technical training and post-secondary education are becoming increasingly important for employment that provides sufficient wages.

Not all jobs that require post-secondary education mandate a four-year degree. These jobs, often referred to as "middle-skill", require training beyond high school, but not a four-year degree. This may include an associate's degree, occupational certification, or apprenticeship. In 2012, 49% percent of Connecticut jobs were middle-skill, however, only 39% of workers had those skills. This discrepancy has created a significant middle skills gap detrimental to our state's workforce and overall economic competitiveness.

Apprenticeship opportunities are critical to closing the middle skills gap and reward both employers and employees. For the apprentice or prospective employee, these opportunities provide a pathway to sufficient wages. For the employers, especially those in high demand fields, apprenticeships help build and retain talent.

CWEALF and the CWCT support the concept of S.B. 837 and the intent to study and build apprenticeship opportunities in our state. In addition to the task force that S.B. 837 would create, the Committee may consider ways to maximize existing federal funds and resources already allocated to the state Department of Labor for apprenticeship opportunities. Any

task force created by S.B. 837 should acknowledge the existing resources available to the state DOL to expand apprenticeship opportunities in our state. This collaboration will expand opportunities for workers to gain the experience necessary to obtain jobs with sufficient wages and benefits.