February 27, 2019

Re: SUPPORT funding Platform to Employment through the Connecticut Department of Labor.

To: Appropriations Committee:
The Hon. Catherine Osten, Co-Chair, The Hon. Toni Walker, Co-Chair, The Hon. Joan Hartley, Vice Chair, The Hon. Michael DiMasi, Vice Chair, The Hon. Maria Horn, Vice Chair, The Hon. Paul Formica, Ranking Member, The Hon. Gail Lavielle, Ranking Member

I am Joe Carbone, President CEO of The WorkPlace in southwestern Connecticut. One of our responsibilities is to administer a statewide program called Platform to Employment (P2E) which serves residents of our state that have been long term unemployed (LTU). Let me begin by thanking members of the General Assembly for supporting this initiative since 2014. When I came here in 2014, I described how the “Great Recession” had left in its tracks a structural realignment of the American workforce. Be it perception or blatant bias, the length of one’s unemployment has become an impenetrable barrier for most workers in their effort to re-enter the workforce. Since the “Great Recession” officially ended nearly ten years ago, we can safely acknowledge that the changes it created were not transitional but rather here to stay. During 2018 nearly 33,500 Connecticut residents exhausted their six months of unemployment benefits and remained out of work. They became LTU at that point and P2E is the only program that has a proven record to help them get their lives back on track.

By the end of this fiscal year, P2E will have served nearly 2,200 Connecticut residents since its inception in 2014. The program is placing more than 80% of participants into work-experience programs which lead to full-time employment. The wages that P2E participants receive has been steadily increasing. In the first year of operations the average wage at placement was $39,724. During the current program year, the average wage at placement is $45,920, a 25% increase.

P2E takes active steps to meet the needs of Connecticut employers while providing access to customized re-employment services specifically designed for the long-term unemployed. This includes emotional, social, and financial interventions. P2E empowers individuals, fosters self-sufficiency and focuses on performance improvements with measurable outcomes. P2E helps participants discover their true potential while providing employers flexible and highly trained, collaborative workers who can think critically and act independently.

P2E provides employers with the opportunity to engage a potential employee, interact with them in a real work environment and evaluate their performance before making a commitment and without cost as P2E pays the employee’s wages. Without the subsidized work experience opportunity, many of the individuals served would not receive consideration for employment.
Nearly 70% of P2E participants are over 50 years of age. Compared to younger job-seekers, older workers experience fewer interviews and job search takes much longer. We know that statistically the 50+ LTU are less likely to find re-employment than any other age sector in the market. The common effects of long term unemployment such discouragement and depression are more prevalent among the 50+ group than others. They are less likely to have the self-confidence required to be competitive in the post-recession economy.

Platform to Employment has strong economic value when considered from the perspective of return on investment. While demand on the state’s safety net of services continues to grow, Platform to Employment is returning residents to work and increasing the base of taxpayer support. This is particularly relevant to older LTU since they are mature workers but not yet old enough for retirement. Maintaining this innovative program will continue to move Connecticut residents back to work and support the state’s economy.

I remind you that all P2E participants have been unemployed for at least six months although many have been unemployed much longer. Their dependence on entitlement programs and the regional safety net is expanding. But P2E has established a consistent, 5-year record of reversing that trend.

I urge you to support the funding specified in the Department of Labor’s budget listed as “Opportunities for Long Term Unemployed”. I believe we have established that the need for P2E in Connecticut has remained strong and it is essential to strengthening the economy. P2E participants came from 155 towns in our state and they came from all walks of life. I ask you to fund this program so that we can help our neighbors who are 50 years of age or older overcome this horrible injustice that has seized opportunity from their lives. P2E has restored hope to Connecticut families and I am certain that it has increased tax revenue to the state.

Thank you again.

Joseph Carbone
President & CEO