CBIA appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Education portion of this bill, specifically with respect to the separation of the CT Technical High School System from the State Department of Education.

Good afternoon. My name is Eric Brown and I serve as vice president of manufacturing policy and outreach for the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA). CBIA represents thousands of businesses, large and small, throughout the state of Connecticut with the majority of our nearly 1,000 manufacturing members having fewer than 25 employees.

In 2017, the General Assembly passed landmark legislation (signed by the governor as Public Act 17-237) establishing the Connecticut Technical High School System (“CTHSS”) as a separate and distinct entity from the State Department of Education. This legislation received bipartisan support and the support of both businesses and union leaders.

This important law is a significant and critical component of the state's urgent need to address workforce shortages in manufacturing and other technical careers.

Having CTHSS as its own entity will give technical education the priority, flexibility and focus it needs to fulfill the crucial role it serves in providing the workforce of our current and future economies.

It is therefore most unfortunate that the current budget proposal under review by this committee, contains no appropriation for the CTHSS’s transition to a separate entity. Rather, Governor has proposed to delay the implementation of Public Act 17-237 for at least one year.¹

With an estimated 10,000 job openings in manufacturing and thousands more in other technical sectors as we sit here today, and many thousands more coming in the next several years, it is our urgent recommendation that this committee, the general assembly and the governor make funding of this initiative a priority.

In fact, this opinion is not ours alone. In passing Public Act 17-237, the General Assembly itself stated in section 8 of the Act (now codified in section 10-99f(b) of the Connecticut General Statutes) that:

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¹ See page 62 of the Governor’s budget proposal, referencing the CTHSS as the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS)
"the Governor, when considering reductions in allotment requisitions or allotments in force, shall give priority to the educational needs of the [Connecticut Technical High School] system and instructional staffing needs . . . and every effort shall be made to avoid impairment of the system's educational mission and interruption to instructional time during such consideration.”

CBIA is acutely aware of the state's serious fiscal condition and the very difficult decisions you and the Governor are forced to consider.

As much as we would like to see the CTHSS fully implemented this year, we recognize that its budget, like every other state funded enterprise, must be closely scrutinized and adaptations made to move forward in a highly constrained fiscal climate.

That is why CBIA has sought to determine the most essential and immediate needs of the CTHSS to proceed with its critical mission this year. It is our understanding that, at a minimum, CTHSS needs to hire a handful of skilled professionals this year (far fewer than the 21-person, full-staffing level it will need to become fully operational) in order to make meaningful progress with its transition.

Accordingly, CBIA urges this committee to consider include at least partial funding to the budget for the CTHSS transition. Enough funding to meet its most immediate needs such that this vital component of Connecticut's strategic workforce training portfolio can make meaningful progress towards achieving its critical mission.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment and for your consideration of our position.