

State Vocational Federation of Teachers

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Testimony of Ed Leavy
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**Raised Bill #5001: AN ACT ENSURING THAT STUDENTS IN
THIS STATE RECEIVE HIGH-QUALITY SKILLS TRAINING.**
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
February 5, 2019

As president of the State Vocational Federation of Teachers, I am proud to represent the over 1200 educators in the technical high school system. In my 34 years in the system, including 24 as a teacher at Bullard-Havens in Bridgeport, I have seen our students build middle-class lives by acquiring the job skills and trades that cannot be outsourced, cannot be replaced by automation, and are necessary for Connecticut's economy to grow. The role the Connecticut Educational and Career System plays in Connecticut's economy is underscored by the presence of the Commissioner of Labor and the Commissioner of Economic Development on our system's Board of Education.

House Bill 5001 is an important reminder that Connecticut historically has been able to attract business because we provide the most highly trained and best educated workforce in the country. As a state, we will never be cheaper than Arkansas and Oklahoma and others, but we can make businesses more productive because of the workforce we provide. Providing that workforce requires a commitment from the State, however; a highly-skilled workforce in Connecticut is not inevitable. House Bill 5001 is a commitment from this body to make the necessary investment to provide that workforce to companies so that our economy and our workers can thrive.

While we seek out new methods of training, however, let us not forget that our technical high school system has done this work successfully for over a century. For the last several years, we have strived to play this important role despite shrinking resources. Veteran trade teachers remember supply budgets – money that goes for wood in carpentry, concrete in masonry, wire for electrical, etc. – that were more than double what they are now, without adjusting for inflation. High-need but high-cost trades such as welding have been phased out over the past two decades and replaced by trades that are less expensive, and now we face a state shortage in welders. Most distressingly, our system must meet its budget by not replacing classroom teachers in a timely fashion, so that students may sit in their shop for months without a certified, qualified teacher. Those students graduate less able to step into the workforce with the necessary skills than they – and their employers – deserve.

Our system has also had to eliminate many adult programs because of cost. My school has had five adult programs eliminated over the past two decades, which means that hundreds of local citizens were denied a low-cost opportunity to improve their skills and thus their lives. We have the equipment, the expertise, and the teaching staff to provide high-quality training to adults either during the school day or during evening hours; we need only the financial investment from the state. I applaud the explicit commitment to developing a highly-trained workforce for Connecticut; I urge you to invest in the technical schools to help reach that goal.

Ed Leavy
SVFT President