

**Testimony Regarding S. B. 799
An Act Concerning Workforce Development
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Higher Education and Employment Advancement
Committee
February 5, 2019**

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Good afternoon Senator Haskell, Representative Haddad, Senator Hwang, Representative Hall, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony regarding S.B. 799, An Act Concerning Workforce Development.

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. As a community foundation, we manage, grow, and distribute approximately \$1 billion in assets to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region, particularly in the areas of education, community safety, and community and economic development. For many years we have funded comprehensive supports to help residents overcome barriers to employment and bring economic security to their families. Evaluations of our work have examined ways that workforce programs can better address participant needs to ensure program completion, job attainment, and job retention.

As written, this bill study could examine any number of workforce development issues. **We encourage the committee to develop a comprehensive study of public and private programs that prepare Connecticut residents for the workforce, with a particular emphasis on the workforce development needs of individuals who face barriers to education, employment or training.** Meaningful employment and accessible career paths are essential to families and communities. However, here in Hartford, unemployment is near 10 percent, and in some neighborhoods it is over 30 percent. In Hartford and across the state, unemployment is particularly high among Black and Latino residents. Many residents are unable to access training, are unaware of training opportunities, or encounter barriers because of their limited literacy skills. Residents facing the most pervasive obstacles to employment include adults with low-literacy, limited English proficiency, or disabilities, returning citizens, individuals facing homelessness, single parents, immigrants, and out-of-school youth.

As a foundation, we work with both nonprofit workforce development supports that receive no state funds as well as our region's publically funded Workforce Development Board. **Our investments have shown that with adequate support, these individuals can contribute meaningfully to the state economy and to the vibrancy of their local communities.** At present, data and dissemination of program outcomes for populations facing barriers to employment is limited even within state- and federally-funded programs. A comprehensive study of available programs and their ability to serve individuals who face barriers to employment could identify concrete steps toward more effective workforce development programming.

In particular, **we recommend that the study report on the following elements listed below:**

- Sectors and skills, including soft skills, needed to grow Connecticut's economy as indicated by labor market information and local employers.
- Availability and use of the above by workforce development providers to develop programs and curricula.
- Possible program reforms to better serve residents without a high school diploma or associate's degree.
- Identification and analysis of barriers to education, training and employment for individuals who are unemployed or underemployed, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and town of residence where available.
- Examination of processes by which employment sectors are chosen for representation within workforce development programs, supporting data used, and how adjustments are made midcourse as employment indicators change.
- Examination of embedded supports within workforce development programs to enhance retention and skill development.
- Data regarding workforce development program retention rates, reasons for attrition, and subsequent job placement and retention rates.

Many public and private programs are in place today to help Connecticut residents attain job skills and employment. This proposed study will help ensure that programs are effective and cost-efficient in helping residents develop job skills, obtain employment, and contribute to their own families and to our state economy as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfpg.org or 860-548-1888.