Written Testimony of:
State Senators Henri Martin (31st District), Heather Somers (18th District)
& Paul Formica (20th District)
To: The Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
In Support of: Senate Bill 685 - AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE APPRENTICESHIP AND
EMPLOYMENT RECRUITMENT AUTHORITY

Good Afternoon Co-Chairs Haskell & Haddad, Vice-Chairs Turco & Flexer, Ranking Members
Hwang & Hall, and members of the Higher Education & Employee Advancement Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of SB 685 - AN ACT ESTABLISHING
THE APPRENTICESHIP AND EMPLOYMENT RECRUITMENT AUTHORITY.

The United States, and specifically Connecticut, is experiencing a potential employment crisis.
There are hundreds of thousands of jobs without qualified workers to fill them in Connecticut.
Our workforce is aging, and our youth population is leaving the state. A skilled workforce is
absolutely necessary for Connecticut to compete, not only with our neighboring states, but also
in the global economy. Businesses have many options when evaluating locations in which to
establish themselves, and access to a skilled workforce is a driving force in that decision making.
Connecticut unemployment currently sits at 4%. In 2016 was 4.9%. But our average youth
unemployment in 2016 was over 10% (ages 16-19: 15.6%, ages 20-24: 7.9%) – more than
double. This bubble of youth unemployment is a result of the strict measurement of success in
our country – a four-year college degree. We must initiate a paradigm shift and begin to redefine
success for our young people, and provide multiple paths to employment that do not necessarily
involve higher education. This approach will prove to be good for Connecticut businesses and
for Connecticut students.

That is why we are submitting testimony in support of SB 685, which would build on the success
of the committee to coordinate education regarding careers in manufacturing (Connecticut
Manufacturing Committee), and extend the model to include careers in healthcare, finance,
information technology, biotechnology, construction, and any other sectors that the Committee
deems appropriate.

In 2016 there were 35,407 jobs in architecture and engineering. In 2026 there will be 41,066. In
2016 there were 103,836 jobs in business & financial operations. In 2026 there will be 112,841.
In 2016 there were 113,463 jobs for healthcare practitioners. In 2026 there will be 124,193.
There are jobs in Connecticut waiting for qualified applicants, and there will be even more in the next ten years. We need to move now to prepare our students and provide the well-trained workforce businesses have come to expect from Connecticut.

The Connecticut Manufacturing Committee (created under Sec. 10-21j of the CT General Statutes) has already had some great success, and the model they are using is transferable to all the other sectors listed above. We envision this legislation to expand the mandate of this Committee and to reverse-engineer the apprenticeship programs for what jobs are available today and what jobs will be available in the next decade. The Committee this bill seeks to create could consist of representatives from, but not necessarily limited to, the State Department of Education, the Department of Commerce, the Labor Department, from the middle school, high school, and technical school systems, regional community colleges, independent institutions of higher education, the CT Employment and Training Commission, trade organizations, or whichever group of stakeholders the committee agrees are necessary and proper. The committee would collaborate with local businesses in need of skilled workers to develop a catalogue of apprenticeship programs and coordinate with middle and high school guidance counselors to inform students of the new options available to them.

The single route to achieving the American Dream, through a University or College degree, is not sustainable. Too many of our students are graduating from college with no skills, no job, and a whole lot of debt, while others do not attend college at all and have trouble getting a job. By creating this public-private partnership between the State Department of Education, our community colleges and Connecticut businesses, we can create a new path to the American Dream where a person’s success is not dependent on a traditional four-year degree, but rather a variety of curricula tailored for individual sectors of employment.

The key to putting Connecticut back on track is to bring business back to this state, but we can’t do that if we do not have the workforce those businesses need. The creation of the Apprenticeship Committee, a public-private partnership, will address both of these steps to revitalizing the Connecticut economy. Expanding upon the already proven Connecticut Manufacturing Committee, the committee created by this bill will spur a necessary paradigm shift that makes clear that students have a wide variety of options that lead to professional success. We need to seize the moment, and start providing these alternative paths of education so that the hundreds of thousands of jobs that are and will be available in this state can be filled by a talented and educated Connecticut workforce.