Good afternoon Representative Haddad, Senator Haskell, Representative Hall, Senator Hwang and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with written testimony regarding proposed Senate Bill # 685: An Act Establishing the Apprenticeship and Employment Recruitment Authority. My name is Kurt Westby and I am the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL).

I appreciate the enthusiasm that this Committee and its members have for increasing apprenticeship opportunities in Connecticut, whether it is increased apprenticeship opportunities in manufacturing or increased manufacturing opportunities for women. These are goals that you and I both share. In fact, I have been pleased that so many of your colleagues in the General Assembly are also interested in advancing apprenticeship opportunities. With that being said, I must oppose proposed S.B. # 685 in its current form because it would have a detrimental effect on the strides that we have made in Connecticut.

Specifically, S.B. # 685 would create an entire new state quasi-public agency called an “Apprenticeship and Employment Recruitment Authority.” A proposed charge of this Authority is to establish employment recruitment opportunities and work-based education opportunities through public-private partnerships for apprenticeships. Much of what the Authority is charged with would be duplicative of the work being done by DOL’s Office of Apprenticeship Training (OAT), the State Department of Education, vocational technical high schools, State Community Colleges, Workforce Development Boards and other workforce partners. The existing apprenticeship program has already developed public-private partnerships and will continue to do so.

The U.S. Department of Labor has designated DOL as the entity in Connecticut with the sole authority to approve apprenticeships. Therefore, the creation of a new government agency is an unnecessary expense to perform duties that are already being capably done.

The Department of Labor’s OAT has been successful in its efforts to increase the number of apprentices. The OAT aggressively seeks out new partnership opportunities for apprenticeships and has been successful in their efforts to grow and recruit the number of apprentices. In Connecticut, we currently have over 6,000 registered apprentices and over 1600 active apprenticeship sponsors (employers) across many sectors from traditional trades, advanced manufacturing, healthcare and insurance sectors.
Increasing the number of manufacturing apprenticeships is a goal that we all share. In order to fill that need, the CT DOL has partnered with the Eastern Connecticut Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative, which provides a training pipeline to develop skilled workers for Electric Boat (EB), the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance (EAMA), and other regional manufacturers. This is a national model that we are working to expand in other regions of the state with other large manufacturing employers.

Furthermore, we have expanded the reach of apprenticeship to new areas of industry and have sought and obtained federal funding for those purposes. Yale New Haven Hospital and the CT DOL have implemented the first nursing apprenticeship of its kind in Connecticut for more than 185 nurses that has immediately improved the one-year nurse turnover rate from the national average of 17.2% to less than 9%. We are now seeking to develop apprenticeship opportunities in the banking industry with the full support of the Banking Commissioner, emphasizing cybersecurity and financial skills development. By expanding the apprenticeship model, CT DOL has effectively promoted the transfer of top quality occupational skills, validated by data, to growing segments of employment in the state.

Despite all of the benefits of apprenticeship, it is important to note the difference between apprenticeship and other on-the-job training opportunities. Unlike an employer-specific internship, the end result of a successfully completed apprenticeship is an industry-recognized credential which is portable to other potential employers. This is not to say that internships or other types of work-based learning do not have value. They certainly do and we must also recognize that apprenticeship may not be best suited for all individuals or employers. Thus, we are open to building different models of work-based training that meet the other needs of employers and employees alike.

Even with all our accomplishments, we are always looking for ways to improve upon our system and welcome any opportunities to discuss the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony.