



Testimony of Ashley Zane
Government Affairs Associate, CBIA
Before the Commerce Committee
Hartford, CT
February 10, 2023
Testifying in Support of:

HB 6585: AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY TO PROMOTE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT USING THE GLOBAL ENTREPRENEUR IN RESIDENCE PROGRAM AS A MODEL.

My name is Ashley Zane and I am a Government Affairs Associate for the Connecticut Business and Industry Association. CBIA is Connecticut's largest business organization, with thousands of member companies, small and large, representing a diverse range of industries from across the state. Ninety-five percent of CBIA member companies have 100 or fewer employees.

I am here in support of HB 6585, '*An Act Concerning a Study to Promote Workforce Development Using the Global Entrepreneur in Residence Program as a Model.*' This bill would establish a working group to conduct a study and make recommendations regarding the feasibility of leveraging the H1-B visa cap exemption process to fill high-value job openings and promote workforce development, using the Global Entrepreneur in Residence program as a model.

Each year, hundreds of international students enroll in the Connecticut public university system, complete their course of study, and return to their home country taking with them the skills, knowledge, and future income potential they have learned and could have earned in our state. Concurrently, Connecticut is suffering from a workforce shortage despite the numerous job training programs and incentives being offered by companies across all sectors of the economy. If every qualified individual filled every open position in the state, we would still have open positions.

This bill would help to address the workforce shortage by examining previously overlooked labor markets to expand the size of our workforce. Connecticut does not have a robust and well-established pipeline to



increase the workforce population using legal immigration to fill workforce needs. However, neighboring states like Massachusetts have already been using the H1-B cap exempt visa process to promote economic growth through their Global Entrepreneur in Residence Program.

By working part-time at the University of Massachusetts, entrepreneurs can obtain a cap-exempt H-1B visa anytime during the year. The program gives an entrepreneur time to master the skills necessary to start up a company and document their talent and ability, so that they can eventually obtain a visa independent of the University of Massachusetts. GEIR graduates to date in Massachusetts have successfully filed capped H-1B petitions in the national lottery. The GEIR program helps entrepreneurs carefully plan their long-term residency strategy with most entrepreneurs spending 9-18 months in GEIR before graduating. The GEIR program from 2015-2019 has resulted in 74% of GEIR Entrepreneurs still active in the US with their companies totaling 1,136 employees and have raised \$712 million in venture capital.

HB 6585 is a positive step in increasing our state's workforce diversity and may prove to be a successful public private partnership for universities and businesses. It is time to look towards creative solutions to fill the workforce gap and increase opportunities for individuals who would like to live and work in Connecticut.

In conclusion, CBIA strongly supports this piece of legislation. Please feel free to reach out to us with any additional questions or concerns you may have.