

# ***TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO COMMERCE COMMITTEE***

*Thursday, February 23, 2023*

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***Office of Workforce Strategy***

## ***Proposed S.B. 869: AN ACT CONCERNING ADDITIONAL CAREER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY THE OFFICE OF WORKFORCE STRATEGY***

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Senator Maroney and members of the Commerce Committee, my name is Kelli-Marie Vallieres, and I am the Chief Workforce Officer for the Office of Workforce Strategy.

The Office of Workforce Strategy is the principal state agency tasked with understanding the macro-landscape of workforce development in the State of Connecticut; charged with organizing the multitude of employment, training, and education programs statewide; and operationalizing the strategic plan of the Governor's Workforce Council. These activities position OWS as a central anchor in any and all workforce initiatives.

I am here today to submit testimony regarding the proposed bill, *S.B. 869: An Act Concerning Additional Career Training Opportunities Offered By the Office of Workforce Strategy*. This bill revises legislation that was developed through Public Act No. 22-118 last year to create a Career Accelerator program under OWS.

OWS was the primary agency tasked with the development of a Career Accelerator program which would provide support for the training of commercial truck drivers through the use of income share agreements or equivalent financial instruments. The legislation states:

"Not later than January 1, 2023, the Office of Workforce Strategy shall design a program to support individuals pursuing training to obtain a commercial driver's license, including through the use of income share agreements or equivalent financial instruments. The Office of Workforce Strategy may competitively procure a consultant to support the design and implementation of the program. The program shall be implemented not later than July 1, 2023."

Existing law tasks OWS with implementing this program by July of this year SB. 869, extends the legislative mandate to cover additional "training for careers identified by the Office of Workforce Strategy." The proposed bill stipulates that implementing the Career Accelerator program for the additional careers identified be completed by July 1, 2024.

We believe that there are several challenges to implementing the Career Accelerator program as outlined in PA 22-118. First, it states funds used for this program be placed in an account that can

accept money from multiple sources, with a provision for carry-over to succeeding years. However, there does not currently exist a mechanism for replenishment of this fund through the repayment of loans which will threaten the fund's sustainability.

Second, preliminary research undertaken by OWS has raised concerns about the exact types of training programs that would have the most sustained impact on students. Given that there is high annual turnover that exceeds 90% in the trucking industry, it is key we give equal weight to exploring other industries for this program that can provide similar, if not better, incomes for trainees when considering the length/difficulty of the training. As such, we would do well to create a holistic program that includes but does not single out CDL training.

Third, existing law asks that an Advisory Committee be set up to help guide this program. Because of its novelty, it is crucial that stakeholder input be a key part of designing this program both in fields explicitly stated in the legislation, such as CDL training, and those yet to be determined by OWS. To this end, we have engaged in discussions with the Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority over how this program can be crafted and are now in the process of developing a wider advisory body. The outcome of this engagement will then inform a competitive RFP process for a program designer. As many of these milestones are sequential, it is crucial to address the issue of implementation timeframe in this legislation and to craft it in a manner that is both timely and realistic.

While the office has been unable to operationalize this program - significant resources have been committed to in our CareerConneCT program for CDL training through our partners at Capital Workforce Partners. Specifically, we have allocated \$4.5 million in ARPA funding for CDL. This is a statewide initiative aimed at marginalized populations, specifically reentering individuals. Additionally, through a collaboration with the Yale Tobin Center for Economic Policy, we have sourced a group of graduate student researchers to identify best practices in the design of the Career Accelerator program, considering efforts in other states such as New Jersey and Indiana. The work from the Yale Tobin Center will be utilized to inform an RFP to design the Career Accelerator program.

OWS welcomes collaboration with Senator Maroney, the Commerce Committee, and other stakeholders to help develop this legislation in such a way that is workable and impactful for the residents and communities here in Connecticut.