

**Office of Workforce Strategy**

## FY26 &amp; FY27 Bonding Subcommittee Hearing Testimony

**Overview**

Good afternoon, members of the Bonding Subcommittee. I appreciate this opportunity to appear before you concerning Governor Lamont's proposed FY 2026–2027 bond agenda for workforce development. My name is Kelli-Marie Vallieres, and I am the Chief Workforce Officer for the State of Connecticut presenting on behalf of the Office of Workforce Strategy. The Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) is led by the Chief Workforce Officer (the Agency's Department Head / Commissioner) who serves as the primary advisor to the Governor on workforce development policy. OWS is an independent, executive branch state agency assigned to the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) for Administrative Purposes Only (APO), i.e. to provide back-office functions such as fiscal and IT support (C.G.S. § 4-124w).

OWS serves as the staff to the Governor's Workforce Council (GWC) and is responsible for the development and execution of the state workforce strategic plan through the coordination of workforce development programs and partners across Connecticut. Our mission is to *make workforce work for everyone*. We are committed to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of background, have a seamless, supported pathway from education and training to a good job, and that every business has the skilled talent they need to innovate and thrive.

The Governor's proposed capital budget recommends that \$30 million existing authorized bond funds for Career ConneCT-related activities be reauthorized for a Workforce Innovation and Sustainability Program, which we will reference in this testimony as the WIS Fund.

The original authorization of \$40 million, was authorized through Public Act 21-111. Of the original authorization, \$5 million has been allocated towards five workforce development initiatives, including Adult Education Remediation pilots, two Artificial Intelligence initiatives (one supporting the Technology Talent Accelerator and one towards training for basic AI skills), a Transportation Research Project, and the design of the Career Accelerator Program. A second \$5 million is planned for the implementation of the Career Accelerator Program.

Our work on these initiatives and our experiences leading Career ConneCT, the Good Jobs Challenge, CT Health Horizons, and the Technology Talent Accelerator demonstrates that workforce development is best served through innovative, agile programming that is industry-informed and responsive to the diverse needs of students and trainees. By reauthorizing the remaining \$30 million bond funds, we seek to support an agile portfolio of initiatives that will continue to build upon the best-practice workforce development models.

### **1. What is the goal of the program?**

To be relevant and high-performing, workforce development efforts need to be responsive to changing labor market demands and address systemic barriers. The WIS Fund will allow OWS to deploy resources to address the most pressing workforce training and education needs in a responsive, agile manner. The WIS Fund will invest in training programs that incorporate strategies proven to result in strong outcomes for jobseekers and employers, including strong industry partnerships, supportive services, flexible schedules and more. Funding will be directed (but not be limited) to programs and practices that have been identified as either best practices, gaps, and/or opportunities for improved performance outcomes.

### **2. What stage of the project does the proposed authorization fund? For example, is this design funding only, with a future authorization expected for construction costs, or is this the annual amount of an ongoing program?**

The WIS Fund will provide support to a portfolio of innovative programs that augment existing workforce development programs with a proven track record and provide catalytic assistance to jumpstart new initiatives that support gaps in existing workforce development programming.

Examples of potential projects:

- Durable skills training: As jobs are increasingly automated, durable skills, such as communication, critical thinking and collaboration, are crucial to success in the workplace, but are not often included in many training and education programs.

- Incumbent worker training in in-demand areas, including but not limited to, artificial intelligence (AI): For example, as AI becomes increasingly integrated into a growing number of jobs, more and more individuals will need to know how to use AI within their day-to-day work to remain competitive.
- Transportation pilot: For many individuals, access to transportation is a barrier to training and employment that could be alleviated through innovative car-based or other solutions. OWS has conducted a study of alternative transportation options that could be considered.

Funding for each project will vary depending on the maturity or stage of the project (e.g., if it is to stand up a new initiative or to scale an existing initiative) but will broadly encompass supporting key activities, developing marketing and communications around each project, and developing and measuring key performance indicators to assess impact. For each project funded, OWS will outline the core activities and expected outcomes with the funding period clearly defined.

OWS will distribute funding through a competitive process. The process will involve stakeholders with domain expertise in workforce development, including appointed members of the Governor's Workforce Council.

### **3. Are there any other funds that will support the program?**

We will actively seek to supplement the WIS Fund with philanthropic partnerships for long-term sustainability, with matching funds supporting projects that meet common objectives. Additionally, we will seek employer in-kind support for innovative initiatives that support workers such as:

- Paid work-based learning experiences
- Education/training loan repayments
- Development of industry-recognized credentials
- Cost-sharing models for childcare and transportation

**4. When is the expected completion date for the program?**

The funds will be disbursed in tranches for selected projects with scope and duration based determined based on each project.