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**Pennsylvania House Education Committee**  
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## **House Bill 168 and House Bill 177**

Good afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to address the House Education Committee today on behalf of the more than 60 CEOs and senior executives who make up the Policy Roundtable of the Pennsylvania Business Council (PBC). I am here today at the Committee's request to comment on House Bill 168 and House Bill 177.

The Pennsylvania Business Council envisions a Commonwealth in which residents enjoy a very high quality of life in sustainable communities, where those who are seeking employment find high quality jobs with good compensation, and where those who invest their capital and hard work can grow firms that flourish and are profitable. The PBC Policy Roundtable, like its national counterpart in Washington, is a forum in which CEOs meet on a peer-to-peer basis to formulate public policy proposals to the most pressing issues of competitiveness. The Policy Roundtable provides senior managers the opportunity to interact extensively with policymakers, policy experts, media, and other stakeholders; participate in policy evaluation; vote on long-term public policy strategy; and guide policy education/advocacy efforts.

We believe improving Pennsylvania's education, and career and college readiness programs are essential steps to make Pennsylvania more competitive and more able to retain and attract family sustaining employment opportunities.

It is my belief that House Bill 177 is largely redundant and unnecessary. PBC understands the concerns of the bill's sponsors – and neither supports or opposes the legislation as drafted. We do not, however, believe it is necessary.

PBC remains staunchly in favor of implementation of the Pennsylvania Core Standards coupled with aligned assessments, better known as the Keystone Exams. PBC believes the keystones, including the graduation requirement, are essential to accountability, giving us:

- assurance our students are adequately prepared for careers and post-secondary education;
- assurance our tax dollars are used to achieve the goals for which they are intended;
- assurance that we can evaluate our schools fairly and uniformly to drive success; and
- assurance that we can evaluate our teachers fairly helping them to master their important roles.

The Pennsylvania Business Council strongly opposes House Bill 168.

Pennsylvania's business community and our organization specifically have been involved for decades in the push for better performance and greater accountability in education. As part of that effort we have worked diligently with several gubernatorial administrations and dozens of lawmakers to develop and implement high statewide academic standards and aligned assessments that assure mastery of core competencies before high school graduation and our education dollars are spent wisely achieving high performance.

The Pennsylvania Business Council strongly supports Pennsylvania's decision in 2010 to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and to later adapt them to the Commonwealth's unique needs as "Pennsylvania Common Core."

The Common Core State Standards were created through the combined efforts of many parties including governors, state education secretaries and commissioners, business leaders, academics, think tanks, associations, foundations, and public school educators. More than 40 states and the District of Columbia have adopted some form of the standards.

Contrary to some of the information circulating, these actions taken over several years beginning in 2006 and were wholly propelled by state government leaders, business groups, and non-profits; not by the Federal government.

In the spring of 2009, the Pennsylvania Business Council Foundation conducted non-partisan survey research into the views and perceptions of Pennsylvania business owners and managers regarding the job readiness of young people.

Four hundred Pennsylvania businesspersons – owners, presidents and very senior managers – were interviewed by telephone. Industries represented in the interviews included Construction, Retail Trade, Services, Agriculture, Mining, Manufacturing, Transportation, Wholesale, and Finance. The interviewees were proportionately representative of Pennsylvania's population centers.

The survey research found:

- Only seven percent (7%) of interviewees were "very confident" that high school students are graduating with the necessary knowledge and skills to perform well in the workplace.
- Only fourteen percent (14%) of interviewees thought the quality of Pennsylvania's workforce had improved in recent years. Half thought it had stayed the same and 33 percent thought it had gotten worse.
- Fifty-six percent (56 %) of interviewees were "somewhat concerned" or "very concerned" about their ability to hire qualified candidates for their companies.
- Only fifty-three percent (53%) of interviewees thought "a high school diploma is a good indicator of a candidate's competency, basic skills, and knowledge."
- Eighty percent (80%) of interviewees were "strongly" or "somewhat" supportive of "new guidelines that would require high school students to meet certain statewide requirements to prove they are proficient in basic skills by passing a series of common final exams in reading, math, science, writing, and social studies in order to graduate."

Of course, there are very few jobs available today for persons with only a high school diploma. In fact, we estimate that only about one-quarter of jobs in Pennsylvania's economy are available to persons with a high school education or less.

Unfortunately, nearly one-half of Pennsylvania's workforce does not possess any post-secondary or higher education credentials. This means there are two applicants for each of our low skill – and correspondingly, low wage – job opportunities. You can imagine that in order to be successful winning and holding one of these jobs, an individual with a high school diploma seeking employment must truly be proficient in English language skills including reading, writing and listening; and in basic algebra skills.

About one-quarter of Pennsylvania career opportunities require a four-year college education or even more (advanced degrees, professional degrees). While we have fewer engineers and scientists than we need and perhaps a few more liberal arts majors than the economy requires, the Commonwealth is close to meeting these needs. More than ever, it is critical that Pennsylvania's young people who hope to have a strong career with a potential for high earnings, must be college ready. And, with the extraordinary cost of higher education and the alarming amount college debt being shouldered by students and their families, it is essential that college-bound students are already proficient in the basics and not in need of costly remediation before commencing their studies.

Now let me address those learners often termed "the forgotten half." About half of the jobs in America – and the world – do not require a four-year college degree, but do require significant and meaningful post-secondary education and training. This includes two-year associate's degrees, technical training, apprenticeships, skills development that might continue from high school in a 2+2 program, or military training.

These jobs – once known as "skilled labor" but increasingly thought of as "gold collar," "technicians," or "para-professionals" – are well paying, family sustaining occupations with long-term career options and trajectories. But our young people must be prepared for this education and training. The technical manuals required for these studies are more complex than many college textbooks. The writing and listening skills required to share technical information between shifts, workteams, and operating units – sometimes across international borders – are mission critical. The required math skills are irreplaceable.

Today employers, union apprenticeship programs, and the US military are unable to find qualified applicants for their training programs because graduating students are simply not proficient in core competencies.

Business leaders support common core as the best way to ensure a future workforce available anywhere in the United States able to compete on a global scale.

The opinion of business leaders is important, but I thought you might be just as interested in knowing what the voters of Pennsylvania think. This chart summarizes the results

In 2012, 2013 and 2014 PBCF conducted polling of Pennsylvania registered voters, asking them: "As you may know, Core Standards have been adopted in Pennsylvania. These standards define what all Pennsylvania students should know in each grade, testing students on a yearly basis, and holding schools accountable for results. Do you support or oppose Pennsylvania Core Standards defining what students must master here in Pennsylvania?"

This table compares results across the years, and provides you with a measure of intensity:

2014				2013				2012			
<b>Total Support</b> 55%		<b>Total Oppose</b> 30%		<b>Total Support</b> 52%		<b>Total Oppose</b> 26%		<b>Total Support</b> 68%		<b>Total Oppose</b> 21%	
Strong 29%	Some 26%	Strong 22%	Some 9%	Strong 27%	Some 25%	Strong 15%	Some 11%	Strong 38%	Some 29%	Strong 14%	Some 8%

While there were questions, criticisms, and recommendations throughout the more than eight years since Common Core was conceived, Pennsylvania's preparation to implement the standards in the 2013/14 school year progressed smoothly and with good cooperation among all parties.

In 2013, there was opposition to Common Core that I would largely characterize as "political" - dealing more with perceptions, personalities, and the role of government than with issues of educational quality. Many of the issues raised during debate of the past two years, while not unimportant, are not actual Common Core issues, but ancillary topics. And some of the criticisms leveled against a national model just don't apply to Pennsylvania's own customized standards.

Many good pieces have been written separating fact from fiction regarding Common Core and explaining why business leaders and others support the standards. I have shared much of that material with the Committee and am happy to gather more for you.

Now in year two of implementation teachers, students and parents are becoming accustomed to the standards and methods. Already you are seeing the polling data respond as support picks-up again.

The point of SB 177, of course, is public input. I cannot understate how much I agree that public input is essential to all public policymaking: the formulation and passage of statutes; the design and implementation of regulations; and even the adjudication of legal questions in our courts. With this PBC completely concurs with the author and co-sponsors of the bill.

The Chapter 4 academic standards and graduation requirements regulatory package, however, was given significant legislative and public review and, in fact, evolved to incorporate many reasonable and worthy proposals that improved the final product.

The State Board of Education which promulgates education-related regulations was created to bring in stakeholders outside the state agency. We took a similar step in the area of environmental policy, creating the Environmental Quality Board. In each case, it was recognized that a broader, interdisciplinary review is required.

The State Board of Education held not only required public hearings and meetings, but numerous outreach meetings around the Commonwealth seeking the input of teachers, school administrators, and parents. Similarly, the Independent Regulatory Review Commission sought the input of countless stakeholders.

I am submitting for the record, and for the benefit of new lawmakers, a description of the State Board membership, purpose, and processes as described on the Board's own webpage. I won't read this verbatim, but will reference it:

*The Pennsylvania State Board of Education was created by the General Assembly in 1963 and reestablished in 1988. The Board is comprised of 21 members, ten of whom serve as the Board's Council of Basic Education and ten of whom serve on the Board's Council of Higher Education. Seventeen members are appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate, for overlapping terms of six years. Four members of the Board are members of the General Assembly who serve as long as they hold majority and minority chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees. The Chairperson of the Professional Standards and Practices Commission is a non-voting, ex officio Board member. Chairpersons of the Board and Councils are designated by the Governor and serve at his pleasure. The 22 members of the board also serve as the State Board for Vocational Education.*

*The Councils and Board meet at least six times a year. Additional Council or Board meetings are held at the call of its chairperson or at the request of a majority of members. The chairperson of the Board and any of the members are entitled to attend the meetings of the Councils. Board committees are appointed by the chairperson of the Board to formulate policy proposals in those areas which fall within the purview of the Board. Council committees are appointed by the chairperson of each respective Council to formulate policy proposals in those areas which fall within the purview of either Council.*

*The Pennsylvania State Board of Education has the power and duty to review and adopt regulations that govern educational policies and principles and establish standards governing the educational programs of the Commonwealth, upon recommendation of its Councils. The Board also has the authority and duty to approve or disapprove an application for the creation of a new school district, or change in the boundaries of an existing school district; establish committees of professional and technical advisors to assist the Councils in performing research studies undertaken by them; manage and have custody of the State School Fund; apply for, receive and administer Federal grants, appropriations, allocations and programs within its purview; adopt policies with regard to institutions of higher education; and, adopt master plans for basic and higher education. The Board also sits as the State Board for Vocational Education and in this capacity sets policy and promulgates regulations regarding vocational and technical education in Pennsylvania.*

*The State Board of Education engages in a constant review and appraisal of education in the Commonwealth. The Board's evaluation takes into account such matters as educational objectives, alternative organizational patterns, alternative programs of study, and the operating efficiency of the education system. The chairperson of the State Board refers all studies and investigations to one of its Councils, and receives and places on the agenda the findings and recommendations of the Council for appropriate action by the Board.*

The “Keystone Exams” are integral to the Chapter 4 regulation. There is little point to statewide standards without a statewide assessment to ensure that our students are proficient in skills and knowledge deemed to be core necessities for career and post-secondary readiness.

I know that the House Education Committee has paid close attention to the totality of the proposal and the care and sensitivity that went into its drafting and redrafting as public comment was considered and accommodated.

The Keystone Exams began as a commitment to “end of course exams” that were recommended by Governor Rendell’s Commission on College and Career Success. I am very proud to say that the business representatives among the Commission members were all employees of Pennsylvania Business Council member firms. Other members and my predecessor were among the persons that contributed on the work teams of the Commission. But also among the members of the Commission and the work teams were high school teachers, career technology center teachers, principals, counselors, school administrators, and school board members. That work continued on after Governor Corbett took office.

The Chapter 4 regulation requires immediate remedial help for students who fail portions of any Keystone Exam and gives them the chance to re-take any tests they fail. The final rulemaking ensures accommodations for special needs students and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students. And, sensitive to the observation that some students simply don’t perform well on standardized tests, the regulation allows students to demonstrate their proficiency with a project based assessment.

Of course, Pennsylvania prides itself on a long tradition of local control in education and government. The recently adopted regulation preserves that local control allowing districts to develop their own curricula and materials and even empowering our school districts the option to develop their own assessment exam subject to approval. And, a school district superintendent can make a determination to waive the graduation requirement and award a high school diploma to a student who has been unable to demonstrate proficiency through Keystone Exams or a project based assessment, but whose body of work through their academic career otherwise suggests mastery of the subjects.

Originally, this regulation included a plan to phase in the Keystone Exams in 10 core subject areas. Later, the Department of Education proposed reducing the number of subjects for which the exams would be developed to save state funds. Many groups, including PBC and the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, testified against the proposed cutbacks and recommended instead, an extended development and phase-in of the exams to accommodate budgetary pressures.

A compromise of that sort was included in the final rulemaking which:

- requires that students achieve proficiency on three Keystone Exams in order to graduate – Algebra I, English Literature, and Biology;
- and in subsequent years, subject to state funding approved by the General Assembly, requires two additional exams in English Composition and Civics & Government; and
- extends the timeline, subject to funding by the Commonwealth, to create the remaining five Keystone Exams for districts for voluntarily use by school districts (Geometry, U.S. History, Algebra II, Chemistry, and World History). Voluntary use does not require the school to provide remediation or retesting.

The regulation is explicit that development of the exams in Geometry, U.S. History, Algebra II, Chemistry, and World History would only proceed with definitive legislative action to fund the development.

HB 168 would forbid the development of any assessments other than Algebra I, English Literature, and Biology. Worse, HB 168 would forbid “the establishment of a minimum level of student performance on a Keystone Exam or any other State assessment as a graduation requirement.”

Without the graduation requirement, our students have no “skin in the game.” This raises questions:

- How do we know the student is ready for more advanced course work, such as Geometry, Algebra II, or Trigonometry?
- How do we know students are ready for post-secondary education without costly and time-consuming remediation?
- How do we fairly evaluate teachers where 15% of an instructor’s performance is based on the state assessment?
- How do we fairly and accurately compare teachers across school districts?
- How do we fairly evaluate school buildings within a large district and districts across the Commonwealth? What is the basis for a comparison without a statewide assessment?
- How do we tell the taxpayers of Pennsylvania that they are getting their money’s worth for the \$27 billion we currently spend annually in local, state, and federal dollars on K-12 education if we don’t use an assessment to measure our performance?

Over the past five years, Pennsylvania has made much progress in education and workforce development. Let’s not backslide.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to take your questions. Thank you.