

CareerBound – House Bill 1725

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am honored to be here today to testify in favor of House Bill 1725. My name is Jan Klevis and I am the Director of Post-secondary and Workforce Education at Lehigh Career & Technical Institute in Lehigh County. We are a career and technical school serving approximately 2700 students from the nine school districts in Lehigh County.

Lehigh County serves nearly 49,000 students in grades K-12 with over 15,000 in grades 9-12. We would love to say that all students leave our school districts with diplomas, ready to enter post-secondary education, already knowing the direction their future will take. Unfortunately, that does not happen for all.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education statistics show that in 2011-2012, 17,000 students dropped out of school in our state. The youth unemployment rate in 2012 for ages 16-19 was 16.8%.

Our students who go on to post-secondary education are not faring much better. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 39.7% of our Pennsylvania students seeking a bachelor's degree in our public universities graduate in four years and 62.1% graduate in 6 years. According to the same report for students attending two-year public colleges, the numbers are worse. Of the nearly 17,700 students counted, only 13.9% of the students completed. In addition, Pennsylvania is second in the nation for student debt where 70% of our students are leaving college with student loans to pay.

I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 1725. I believe we can improve all of those statistics if we can provide strong career planning for students in the schools. Students should make career choices based on solid knowledge of the labor market aligned to their abilities and interests. This has to happen while they are still in school and not after they are in college. On Penn State's website on how to change your major, the following advice is given: "Research by Penn State and other institutions has shown that up to 80 percent of students entering college admit that they're not certain what they really want to major in, even if they've initially declared a major." Is it no wonder so many students drop out or take six years to graduate with a lot of student debt.

But college is not the only way for a student to gain the skills needed for a job that will pay family-sustaining wages. We hear every day from employers across the Lehigh Valley that they cannot find enough skilled labor, particularly in the manufacturing

arena. Sadly, most students and their parents do not know these great paying jobs exist.

Monthly, our Lehigh Valley Workforce Investment Board posts the Job & Labor Market Outlook. It provides an overview of what the job market looks like in the Valley. In the October 2013 report, sixteen manufacturers were looking for skilled workers. In the same document which provides wage information, an electro-mechanical technician can earn an average annual wage of \$52,890. A machinist can earn \$41,430 and those with CNC programming skills can earn much more. These are jobs with salaries that rival a first-year teacher's salary. Students can learn these types of technical skills at a school like Lehigh Career & Technical Institute while they are still in high school—and leave with no student debt. A common misperception is that a student attending a career and technical program will not be able to go to college. To the contrary, the Pennsylvania Department of Education Programs of Study SOAR program (Students Occupationally and Academically Ready) provides statewide articulation to community colleges, allowing students to earn college credits while still in high school and creating a seamless transition to college. Many career and technical schools have developed additional articulation agreements with numerous colleges to promote postsecondary education. Upon graduation, students are prepared to enter the workforce while advancing their education at a postsecondary institution. Many companies offer tuition reimbursement programs, encouraging employees to pursue a higher career pathway. In 2012, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, PASSHE, approved the Bachelors of Applied Science in Technical Leadership degree, a collaborative program with Lehigh Career & Technical Institute, Lehigh Carbon Community College and Bloomsburg University. The impetus for the creation of this new major was to address the needs of business and industry, scaffolding technical skills with supervisory and management competency. The program set a benchmark for schools statewide and is designed to translate into partnerships with other Pennsylvania community colleges and technical schools. This exemplifies a true career pathway to high wage, high demand, high skill jobs.

HB 1725 empowers school districts to work with local workforce investment boards and business and industry to develop school-to-work programs that will provide students and their parents with viable knowledge about the job market. It will also facilitate the expansion of existing programs geared toward work-based learning, allowing more students to participate and encouraging more businesses to become involved. Clear, well-defined career pathways are the key to effective workforce development, utilizing early exploration in a practical way to make the connection between school and work.

Drop-out prevention is a critical issue for schools as well. A positive outcome of connecting the workforce system to in-school youth is the impact CareerBound can

have on at-risk students. Implementing innovative school-to-work experiences can be the impetus to jump-start student re-engagement in school.

School counselors are very busy on a daily basis dealing with the social and emotional needs of today's youth. They do not have the time or expertise to advise every student in their school about potential career choices. They may be able to provide information about an appropriate college or university for those students who have an already established career path but for those "undeclared" students, little advice is available. HB 1725 will address that issue, providing a CareerBound counselor in schools who will have time to talk about careers, particularly in high priority occupations such as manufacturing. This person will connect with the business/industry partners who can provide visits to their facilities or send guest speakers into classrooms to talk about the jobs and the skills needed to be successful. Companies want to work with schools and schools are opening their doors. We have an excellent example in Lehigh County where B. Braun Medical has partnered with the Catasauqua School District to teach career awareness to ninth grade students in the classroom as well as at their medical device manufacturing plant.

There is no negative here. Students will get much needed career advice to direct them in making better career choices, thereby saving them time and money. Armed with career knowledge, more students will enter the pipeline for the high-paying, high-skilled jobs in high-priority occupations, particularly in manufacturing and health care. Companies may receive tax credits as a bonus for working with school districts. Lehigh County has many partnership models already in place and working well. We would like to see this expand across our county and our state. We believe House Bill 1725 will help do just that.

Thank you

Respectfully submitted by Lehigh Career & Technical Institute

Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Strategy Program / PA WInS – House Bill 1878

Next, I would like to speak to the PA Workforce Investment Strategy proposal, referred to as PA WInS. Across the board, the message heard by the education, training and the workforce community is that business and industry needs help to upskill their workforce while continuing production and remaining competitive in the market.

The existing Industry Partnership structure has been successful in the Lehigh Valley, bringing together like businesses for the purpose of collaboration and to provide a venue for dialog and information sharing. Through this system, an effective framework for workforce development has been established by working directly with companies, the WIB, career and technical education and community colleges. The need continues to exist for this type of structure and funding, incentivizing companies to invest in developing their current workforce. While funding for Industry Partnerships has been diminishing, it is critical to remain cognizant of the challenges faced by business and industry in their quest to balance training with production. Therefore, providing tax credits coupled with the continuation of Industry Partnership funds will provide dual options for companies of any size.

Schools such as Lehigh Career & Technical Institute have developed a solid reputation for delivering targeted, outcome-based technical training for business and industry, customized to meet specific needs and working in tandem with the WIB. A common thread of technical training needs has emerged among numerous companies over the years, especially in the areas of manufacturing, transportation and logistics, however the challenge is how to deliver consortium-based training. Although training needs, skills and competencies may be the same, each company's scheduling needs and proprietary intellectual property may prohibit consortium-based classes in some instances.

Engaging employers to form a consortium to be known as the Cooperative Workforce Investment Partnership or CWIP may help to further define like skill sets within each industry sector by creating smaller, more focused employer groups. One of the challenges, which has become evident over time, is the absence of 'talking the same talk' in regards to job titles, duties and competencies, especially in the area of manufacturing. Some industries, machining and welding for example, lend themselves well to identifying commonalities while others like electromechanical are not easily delineated, even though commonalities exist. In the pursuit to leverage resources in the most efficient manner, it is critical to be keenly aware of the need to continually update the much-talked about skills gap that exists within the workforce. The model in the Lehigh Valley is here and it is working. Let's work to expand and improve it through more dedicated resources, tax incentives and additional Industry Partnership funding as we have seen success in sector initiatives.

Thank you

Respectfully submitted by Lehigh Career & Technical Institute and the
Lehigh Valley Workforce Investment Board