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TO: Chairman Botzow and Members of the House Commerce and Community Development Committee
FROM: Dr. Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary, Agency of Education
DATE: April 19, 2017
RE: S. 135 – An act relating to promoting economic development, E.1 and E.2

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The Agency of Education (AOE) appreciates the Committee's support and continued interest in our efforts to better align education systems with state workforce needs. More specifically, I am speaking to our work in adult education and career technical education (CTE), two federal- and state-funded programs that are housed within the AOE. Both of these programs represent flexible pathways toward high school graduation for students and are also bridges to a well prepared workforce for Vermont.

Context

The goal of the Agency is to provide Vermont students with high quality educational opportunities, with the best value per dollar, in the most equitable way possible. In the area of career readiness, the AOE supports this goal by:

- developing a robust, high-quality **career advising and guidance system** that is aligned with high-wage, high-growth sectors;
- focusing existing personnel and financial resources on the development of employer-led, **rigorous programs of study** that include **both secondary and postsecondary elements** and are embedded within transparent **career pathways** for high-skill, high-demand occupations;
- expanding student participation in **postsecondary programs** that lead to industry-recognized credentials or degrees that signal higher levels of skill

These actions are aligned with Governor Scott's priorities regarding affordability, fostering growth in the economy and attending to the needs of vulnerable populations.

Our action plan is funded and shaped by federal Carl D. Perkins grant funds, which support all of the AOE's positions dedicated to CTE. The Perkins program has very specific purposes – many of which align with the Agency's goals for CTE. However, our CTE team also coordinates closely with our Personalization and Flexible Pathways team to determine how to best leverage personalized learning plans (PLPs) and work-based learning (WBL) that introduces all students to career awareness, exploration, and preparation.

In addition, the AOE is collaborating with colleagues at both the Department of Labor and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, as well as the Vermont Business Roundtable, on a project to engage business and industry experts in defining industry needs and workforce expectations. This partnership with employers is guiding our development of

robust, state-endorsed career pathways in three high-wage, high-growth economic sectors: healthcare, construction/green building design, and advanced manufacturing. These career pathways and CTE programs of study will connect middle and secondary students to postsecondary education, stackable credentials connected to technical fields, and good jobs with Vermont employers.

Comments on S.135, Sections E.1 and E.2

I'm going to focus solely on revised aspects of the bill. I anticipate that's what the Committee had in mind. In terms of the slight changes in wording throughout, (e.g., change to "Workforce Development Leader" in E.1, §540), we see nothing problematic from our end.

E.1, §540 proposes to report on the gender of trainees (which would most likely be adult education students in AOE's case). This would not be problematic from AOE's end, as U.S. Department of Education requires us to collect demographic information from all students served, including their gender. However, my understanding is that this addition may prove challenging for our colleagues in Department of Labor and we defer to them on this issue.

With respect to the Workforce Education and Training (WET) fund, we appreciate the attention to supporting a pipeline approach, beginning in younger grades such as middle school. This is consistent with AOE's efforts to boost career advising via the personalized learning plans (PLPs) that are now required of all 7th to 12th grade students. However, we understand that federal rules and regulations that DOL must abide by may make this addition challenging to implement. Accordingly, we also defer to our colleagues' testimony about the inclusion of middle school grades in WET fund grant awards.

Given AOE's current and planned investment in providing support to our local educational agencies so they improve career advising and planning for all students, we are concerned that adding a new category of "Career Focus and Planning programs" to the WET fund (§543(B)(4)) may not be the most efficient use of our scarce state resources. For instance, we have just awarded state grants to 16 supervisory unions and school districts to support projects that strengthen career advisories in schools, enhance work-based learning efforts and expand students' learning opportunities outside of the classroom. Moreover, Governor Scott's FY18 budget includes secondary school transformation grants that will continue to support these activities. Students enrolled in CTE programs are typically receiving career advising and planning services linked to their program of study.

We are committed to work with our partners in DOL, ACCD and VSAC to ensure that all students have access to a robust career advising system in their schools. We believe it is best that this work, especially with younger students, is led by AOE. Indeed, this was a core goal of the inter-agency New Skills for Youth grant that Vermont was recently awarded. And it fits precisely within the Career Pathways model we are all building (see handout for an example of PK-12 career pathways system diagram).

Thank you for your time and attention.