



Testimony on Workforce Development

House Commerce and Economic Development Committee

Betsy Bishop, President, Vermont Chamber of Commerce

March 13, 2019

Vermont Chamber Work

- We are engaged in several initiatives:
- We work with Vermont Tech through our manufacturing summit each fall to place graduates in Vermont businesses.
- We operate a nationally recognized food handling certification process. About 100 workers a year earn their ServSafe certificate which is recognized throughout the food industry in restaurants, delis and supermarkets.
- Last year, we worked on H.608 to get the working group to consider older Vermonters as a vital part of the workforce
- The Futures Project has offered 6 recommendations for workforce development: Data, Marketing, Employer of Choice, Internships, CTE funding, Incentives

Specific Funding Initiatives

- Marketing – Support the \$500,000 to market Vermont as a place to live and work.
- Reloc802 – Support the \$500,000 to ensure there is greater emphasis on concierge service rather than booklets and referrals.
- Downtown Program – Support the increase in the annual appropriation for the downtown tax credit program and suggest adding language to form a working group to supplement this work with a grant program for independently owned downtown businesses.

Vermont Training Program

- The Vermont Training Program is a highly successful program with an established ROI for the state, businesses and employees.
- This is a government program that is well-liked by businesses and one they use and by all standards is working well.
- This is a tangible incentive and we need to preserve the current \$1.2 million for this program without carving out money for other specific programs.
- Demographics: Considering that we have a 27% decline in high school graduates a low unemployment rate, and an aging workforce, keeping VTP funded is a key part of the

solution to growing our economy and teaching our workforce new skills so that they continue to work. It's an investment in both the worker and the business.

- Our manufacturing members get certified or registered to three major types of standards: ISO (International Organization for Standardization), AS and International Training. These standards:
 - Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of company operations
 - Meet contractual or regulatory requirements
 - Meet customer preferences
 - Meet risk management compliance for supply chain integrity, credibility and assurance
- Simply put, certification is a supply chain requirement and cost of doing business for our manufacturing members competing in a very competitive, global market place and wanting to do business with sub primes, primes, Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), systems integrators and large government contractors.
- Currently, the Vermont Training Program supports training for these standards in these high wage, good benefit businesses.
- The challenge for our manufacturing members is that there are high costs to securing and maintaining certification/registration. This is important for maintaining and growing employment in the Vermont manufacturing sector.

Ideas for Consideration

- Senator Ashe held an employer meeting in Chittenden County with businesses that employ New Americans. He wrote a letter to several of his committee chairs with 15 recommendations for them to review and include in legislation.
- Senator Ashe also charged his Corrections committee with the effort of reducing the prison population by 250. We have suggested that if that happens, we would like to see employers as part of the discussion to ensure there is training and a bridge to full time employment which will help reduce recidivism and the workforce shortage.

Summit

We are holding a statewide Workforce & Talent Summit on May 30th in coordination with ACCD, DOL, and Advance Vermont. We will have 20 seminars and keynote speakers as part of this event. The goal is to provide learning for businesses, training providers and leaders in education to understand more fully what is available and where we have experienced success.