

February 13, 2019

Members of the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee,

I want to thank you for the invitation and opportunity to testify before your committee by telephone on this snowy Vermont day. Despite what the Groundhog indicated two weeks ago, it appears that winter will be with us for a bit longer than what his calendar had predicted.

How Are the ATE Programs Aligned with the Workforce Needs of Rutland County

My name is William Lucci, and I am the Assistant Director for Adult Technical Education at Stafford Technical Center in Rutland. For more than a decade I have been proud to be the point person in our career center in creating workforce development courses and programs for adult students in our region. Prior to assuming this position in 2005, I was the Curriculum Coordinator for Stafford Technical Center's high school side of the house where we were one of the first career centers in the state to design our curriculum and career programs around articulation agreements with post-secondary schools, dual enrollment opportunities for our students with CCV's Fast Forward Program, and most importantly, alignment with industry-recognized credentials that would lead our high school seniors into a chosen field upon graduation. Because the governance structure of our career center includes the input of a highly engaged Regional Advisory Board (RAB) that is comprised of two dozen members of the greater Rutland business,

education, and political communities, over the years our career center has developed CTE programs that meet the needs of statewide, regional and national employment trends. While in some cases we have added offerings like our Robotics and Engineering program, other times we have ceased to offer programs as was the case with our Music Technology Program. In 2005 we were the first school to partner with a local business to develop a Commercial Driver's License training program for qualifying high school seniors who might consider working for Casella Waste Systems, one of New England's largest trash haulers and processors. With substantial funding and support from John Casella, we developed the curriculum and had it approved by the Vermont Agency of Transportation, hired and paid the instructors, recruited the students, and delivered the instruction that led to over three dozen students earning a CDL-B license. This occurred because at that time all indicators pointed to what would become a substantial shortage of truck drivers throughout the United States. This prediction over a decade ago by workforce development experts and leaders in the trucking industry has manifested into a reality that continues to plague our workforce in numerous sectors. America needs truck drivers, pure and simple. And when the recession hit Vermont, funding for our program from Casella dried up, but our need to keep the program going did not. With the help of a grant from the Vermont Department of labor, we were able to purchase our own vehicles and trailers, and we still operate the only non-proprietary tractor-trailer driving school in the state of Vermont, turning out dozens of qualified drivers who are working for local and regional carriers all across the state. These partners come to our school on Saturday mornings and recruit drivers who are earning

their A and B licenses, many of whom are working full-time jobs in other industries. Owners and HR recruiters from Bellavance Trucking, Baker Distributing, Farrell Distributing, Mosher Excavating, Pepsi, Schneider, Casella, Thomas Dairy, McDermott's, Rutland Fuel, Irving, and Proctor Gas Company are all frequent visitors to our North Clarendon classroom. In fact, Gary Boutin from McDermott's has accompanied me twice to the Marble Valley Correctional Facility to recruit inmates who are due to be paroled to consider working for McDermott's after completing a training program with Stafford technical center. Were it not for our system of instructional delivery--providing instruction on weekends--it would be impossible for them to make this transition to the trucking industry.

This successful program is but one example of how our organizational structure is a logical match for our philosophy and mission which is to develop relevant, customer-driven education and training to consumers in our service region. These consumers are not just students, they are also business partners and other stakeholders who feel connected to our center and see us as an important partner in helping them address education and training dilemmas they are facing in their sectors. And while we must acknowledge that we don't always have all of the answers or solutions to all of the questions were are asked, or problems our region faces with regard to workforce development we are always happy to be a partner at the table to contribute our talents and resources in an effort to address a challenge in our community.

Building Capacity in Adult Workforce Development

Your committee posed the question of how our career centers can help build capacity in workforce development for adults. We see our career center and I view my program as a business rather than strictly as a school. Believe it or not our local business partners sense this and are more receptive to working with us because they know that we see adult education and workforce development as a business. They know that we understand as they do that manufacturers only develop and produce a product that people desire or that has market value. We also understand that consumers will only purchase a product that is of high quality, is of reasonable price, and will have a meaningful return on investment. In developing our "products" as it were, we take into account the nexus between community and organizational capacity building. We understand our role in developing a regional process by which Stafford Technical Center and its many stakeholders work together to obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, equipment and other vital resources that are needed to do our respective jobs competently or to a greater capacity which might include to a larger scale, to a larger audience, or to result in a greater impact. Stakeholders in the Rutland region are keenly aware that capacity building or realizing our potential cannot be accomplished alone. We are a small community in a small state and have come to realize that we all have a role in keeping of our region relevant and viable for everyone who lives here. That is why it is important that Stafford Technical Center has the ability to focus its energy and spend its human resources in getting the most bang for the buck in building capacity in its workforce development for the principle players driving

economic development in our region. This is not to say that we ignore the education and training needs of smaller employers, it merely suggests that the onus is on us to strategically prioritize the needs of those organizations that have the greatest potential for positive growth of our local economy.

A case in point is our ever-evolving positive relationship with General Electric Aviation. Employing over 1,200 full-time workers between two plants in Rutland, GE is seen by the greater Rutland community as pivotal in the economic vitality of our region, providing excellent wages and benefits to its nearly 1,200 manufacturing workers. Over the past eighteen months, GE has been working toward developing a substantial pool of workers to replace a large portion of its workforce due to attrition and incentivized early retirements. The sheer volume of this task was daunting to GE's Human Resource Department, and so after meeting with Stafford Technical Center ATE staff, we entered into an agreement where all of GE's pre-employment screening would be provided through Stafford Technical Center. This would include delivering GE's computer-based aptitude and academic testing to all candidates for its Maintenance Technician, Manufacturing Operations, and Toolmaker apprenticeship candidates. Since July 1, 2018 we have screened over 700 candidates for these positions which enables GE HR staff to focus only its efforts to interview and hire employees to meet its hiring goals in an efficient and expeditious manner. Upon hearing that we provide these testing services for General Electric Aviation, we were contacted by GS Precision in Brattleboro to assist them in evaluating the mechanical and academic aptitude of a much smaller number of candidates for employment. We were happy to travel to Brattleboro to provide the

same service for this important player in Windham County as it was beginning to develop a comparable apprenticeship program for high-performing incumbent workers in its manufacturing facility.

Another regional partner who recently reached out to us was the Community Health Centers of the Rutland Region (CHCRR). After meeting with their Human Resources Manager and Clinical Director, we have developed a training program for incumbent workers throughout their nine practices that will provide 15 people with an opportunity to become certified Medical Assistants after they have completed their classroom training and internship experience with us between March and July of this year.

CHCRR Primary Care Offices offer a full range of services including preventative health care, annual, work, school, camp and sports physicals, women's health care, well-child care and immunizations, management of chronic or serious illness, minor office procedures, workers comp injuries, and X-ray and laboratory services are available at some of its locations. This program will provide completers with an opportunity to test for the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) credential from the National Healthcareer Association. Our response to their need to have a high-quality, fast track, career-focused training program to meet the needs of their dedicated staff and patients in their nine practices was born of our ability to quickly analyze what was needed in their practices through the lenses of its practice leaders, and then create a program to meet those needs.

And while these are two high profile and high impact examples of our ability to build capacity in our service region, there are many other examples of customized training

programs that we have developed to meet the needs of specific businesses over the past two years. These include:

- ✓ Two high impact all-day grant writing seminars for members of the not-for-profit community. Scheduled during our winter and spring vacation breaks so as to not impact our high school programming, Anne Lezak has created both an introductory and advanced grant writing training experience that has drawn dozens of attendees from Rutland, Bennington, Addison, Franklin, and Chittenden Counties over the past five years;
- ✓ Several comprehensive allied health programs that address the critical shortage of qualified candidates in many areas of the health careers field including a home-grown medical coding certificate program, a hands-on phlebotomy certificate program, one of only two Medication Nurse Assistant programs in the state, and a day program for Licensed Nurse Assistant candidates to provide single parents with an instructional delivery model that fits their complicated lives and schedules. Most of the graduates from these programs earn industry-recognized related credentials from the Vermont Board of Nursing or the National Healthcareers Association and are working at long term care facilities;
- ✓ A welding school that offers not only cost-effective education and training opportunities to earn a credential through the American Welding Society upon successful completion of a carefully sequenced 24-week curriculum, but also provides customized welding training for agencies and businesses such as the

Vermont Agency of Transportation, Hubbardton Forge, and General Electric Aviation;

- ✓ An alliance with the High School Completion programs at Vermont Adult Learning sites in Burlington and Rutland that provides its participants with the opportunity to register for and access inexpensive online courses offered by Cengage Learning directly through our portal with Stafford Technical Center offering VAL a flexible monthly billing option.

Beyond having built relationships with so many employers in our region we have to acknowledge that building this level of capacity is only possible because Stafford Technical Center staff has been fortunate enough to identify and cultivate key relationships with that foster successful program development and participation. These relationships include one with our VSAC Outreach Counselor Martha McCaughin who works with most of our adult students from Rutland, Bennington, and Addison Counties to identify courses and programs in our catalog to meet their career development needs and then shepherding them through the application process to determine eligibility for the Non-Degree Grant. Our entire Rutland legislative delegation is supportive of our efforts locally, with Brian Collamore and Larry Cupoli being two of the most vocal supporters of the work we are doing in career and technical education. Maureen Hebert who leads the Continuing Education and Workforce Development Program at Vermont Technical College has been a key partner in creating and expanding our mutual relationship with General Electric Aviation. We also are fortunate to have positive connections with Wendy Morse and Stacey Carmody from the Rutland office of the

Vermont Department of Labor who routinely refer capable job seekers to our career center as does Kris Bascue and his staff from VABIR. We also count among our allies Nancy Andrus and Karen Brouillette from the Vermont Agency of Transportation, and Stu Johnson Branch Manager for Vermont Local Roads who have consistently referred or enrolled countless candidates in our CDL and AOT municipal welding programs over the past several years. And finally, our relationship with Rick Bugbee and his staff of the Vermont Associates for Training and Development have assisted numerous job seekers over the age of 55 to receive the information technology training they need from Stafford Technical Center to effectively re-enter the local workforce. Key partners like these who endorse and actively promote the work that we do in workforce development are critical to building capacity in any community.

Obstacles Facing ATE Professionals in Replicating This Success

I know that for many of my colleagues who struggle to provide these types of opportunities through their regional technical centers the issue is multifaceted. First they face challenges in providing the depth and breadth of workforce development programs that our communities deserve because of staffing limitations. I believe that you will find a correlation between instances where there is a full-time commitment to workforce development at a career center and the development and deployment of successful programs that meet the needs of the local economy. Currently, there are only three professionals (including me) who are responsible for providing this education and training through our career centers doing it full-time. Most of my colleagues are also responsible for providing services to the high school side of the house as

Work-Based Learning Coordinators, Assistant Directors, or Outreach Coordinators.

Splitting their time between what is essentially two major responsibilities means that you pick and choose between what project is most important at any given time. And when the hard choice is made on either side of the house, the opportunity that arises on the other is almost always lost. In my experience, it is generally workforce development that takes a back seat to the needs of the high school—and rightfully so. But in an ideal world, we shouldn't be put in a position to prioritize one group of students over another, and with appropriate staffing at every career center it won't ever become an issue.

They also face the obstacle of having nominal funding from their local school districts, limited financial support from school and community business partners, and protracted support from state and local government which sometimes hampers their ability to have the equipment and tools needed to provide the specialized training their employers seek. Considering the level of support traditional students receive from all of these funding sources I think an honest conversation needs to take place between all stakeholders to establish sensible priorities for adult workforce development programs at our regional technical centers that will result in the creation of initiatives that will result in an increased commitment by the business community. There is nothing like the public chatter of a single success story to help a program's credibility and make even quiet observers become ardent and vocal emissaries of the work that our career centers are doing to help address workforce development needs in the local communities.

How Can the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee Help Advance Our Efforts?

The Committee should take a moment to send a small delegation to visit some of the more successful workforce development programs that are operating through our career centers at the present time. In my opinion there would be nothing quite like a “boots on the ground” experience to truly understand the potential that exists for adult workforce development initiatives in our regional career centers if the perfect storm of staffing and funding initiatives are created to allow it to happen.

A small delegation from your Committee could also attend a quarterly meeting of the Vermont Adult Career and Technical Education Association (VACTEA) to gather the collective thoughts and wisdom of the membership of this organization comprised of workforce development professionals from all seventeen Vermont career centers.

Having a roundtable discussion with this group will assist the Committee in getting a full and clearer picture of the workforce development needs of every region of the state through the eyes and ears of those professionals who are charged with delivering it.

Continued or even expanded funding of the Non-Degree Grant program through VSAC will enable adult students to access the critical funding necessary for them to pursue workforce development training throughout the calendar year. As a rule, this funding source is exhausted by February of each year which prevents many adult students from enrolling in these programs until new funding is available on July 1st.

In the day programs at most career centers, administrators establish a rotating fund and calendar for CTE programs to acquire new or upgraded equipment that would benefit education and training in their program. Each instructor knows when it is their “turn” to access this fund and they plan accordingly. Perhaps a pool of funding can be allocated through Commerce and Economic Development whereby adult programs at each career center has access to a similar fund that will enable it to expand or improve existing programs that have been or have the potential to be successful within their region.

Conclusion

I would be happy to entertain any questions from the members of the committee regarding the information provided in this testimony or anything else that is of interest to you about workforce development in general, the Stafford Technical Center Adult and Continuing Education Program or any other initiatives delivered through Stafford Technical Center by Rutland Public Schools.