

February 25, 2020 Testimony

For the record, my name is Len Schmidt. I'm the Assistant Director for Adult Education at the Hannaford Career Center in Middlebury. I'm also a member of the Vermont Adult CTE Association, and am speaking with you today at the request of Chris Damato, the current president of that group. I served as president of the Association during the initial development of the Adult CTE Equipment Grant Pilot Program, and Hannaford Career Center was awarded a grant under that program for the purchase of welding simulation equipment to be shared among Tech Centers throughout the State.

I'll start by saying that I was very skeptical of the Equipment Grant program when it was first proposed in January 2018. One of the greatest strengths of the Adult CTE network is our unique position to access fairly impressive equipment resources after school hours when our Tech Centers are not in session. We are limited more by costs of program development than equipment resources. I also was concerned that the Department of Labor was tasking the Association with developing a process for determining which of our members' proposals to recommend, and that this had the potential to create divisions within the Association at a critical stage of organizational development.

What was absolutely critical to the success of the Equipment Grant Pilot Program, and I do feel that it has been successful, was the inclusion in section C which requires sharing with at least one other Tech Center, DOC, or a post-secondary college. Rather than divide our Association, the requirement for equipment sharing caused us to become more cohesive rather than competing for available funding. During the last two years, we have seen an increase in statewide Adult CTE offerings and development of several models for collaboration and resource sharing among Tech Center adult programs.

While competition between Tech Center Adult Ed programs for available resources and students continues to occur, it is much less of a problem than perceived or real competition between tech center adult programs and CCV and VTC. I was once very worried about the original H.901 creating divisions among tech centers. In reality, a combination of very carefully crafted language, support and involvement from Vermont DOL, and shared leadership at the Vermont Adult CTE Association helped us to build collaboration. The challenge of increasing collaboration between Adult CTE programs and Vermont State Colleges is even greater, as are the benefits.