



Testimony on H.533, Workforce Development

Senate Economic Development Committee

Betsy Bishop, President, Vermont Chamber of Commerce

April 3, 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
- We are partnering with ACCD and DOL to hold a statewide Workforce & Talent Summit on May 30th in coordination with Advance Vermont, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund and the Vermont Futures Project. 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.

Appropriations of \$1.595 Million (Sec. 14)

- Marketing – Support the \$250,000
- Relocation Assistance – Support the \$250,000
- Relocation System – Support the \$275,000 (discuss current work by chambers of commerce, and the need for finding a job, rather than referrals)

Vermont Training Program (Sec. 1)

- 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. Therefore we are fine with the language that creates benchmarks and not mandates for the funding in this section.
- 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.

Outreach and Recruitment

We are supportive of the creativity for outreach and recruitment of a variety of populations in this bill. Specifically:

- Sec. 8 – The on base recruitment of servicemembers separating from the military. Our Veterans are a highly valued and proven workforce pool that have the potential to continue greatly benefiting Vermont.
- Sec. 10 - Easing the path to employment for new Americans (discuss member experience: Foodscience, Autumn Harp, Birnn Chocolates). We have reviewed Senator Ashe's letter on this topic and encourage this committee to look for ways to add to this section in from his 15 recommendations.
- Sec. 12a - 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. This section of the bill is a good start to that process.

Additional Ideas

Downtown Grant Program

We see our small, independent businesses struggling to survive in this online world. The resolution of the Wayfair case has paved the way for equality of taxation, something we are quite pleased about. While the funds that flow from that decision are spoken for, we think there is an opportunity for the State to further strengthen our local communities in a way similar to other successful programs.

We are requesting that you create a working group and add it to this bill. We see this as part of the existing Downtown Program, and believe they should be a key part of this working group along with legislators, local businesses and other key partners. This working group would assess

the feasibility and need of a matching grant program for local businesses to assist them in two key areas:

1. infrastructure (project planning, permitting, building and equipment costs)
2. marketing (website enhancements, use of paid marketing plans, combatting online competition)

The focus of this potential grant funding is to gain access to wholesale markets and encourage patronage of local businesses. Applicants would need to demonstrate measurable impact, accountability, sustainability, and clearly explain how their proposal will enhance Vermont's economy and culture on both local and statewide levels. This could promote consumer investment in downtowns and provide additional support for our Main Street businesses to compete with their exclusively online counterparts.

10,000 Workers Needed

The Vermont Futures Project has identified the workforce supply gap and set a target of adding 10,000 workers to the workforce annually by 2040. We encourage the Committee to adopt this goal within H.533 so that this new focus and any efforts in the public and private sector are focused on achieving this level of additional workforce participation.