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## T E S T I M O N Y

To: House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development  
From: Sarah Buxton, Director of Workforce Development, Department of Labor  
Date: February 11, 2022  
Subject: VDOL's Workforce Development Proposals

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Over the last two decades, Vermont's aging population and demographic shifts have decreased the supply of available workers to support Vermont's businesses and economy. As we emerge from the pandemic, it's imperative that we focus on reversing the current workforce shortage. There are 25,000 fewer workers in Vermont now than pre-pandemic. This testimony focuses on three initiatives the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) proposes for FY2023 to help workers land jobs with employers who urgently need them.

### 1. Workforce Expansion System (\$2.7m one-time over two years)

- (a) Regional Workforce Specialists: Two-year pilot that places (6) workforce expansion specialists in Barre, Bennington, Brattleboro, St. Albans, Rutland and St. Johnsbury regions to focus on workforce expansion by:
- Bridging gap to help job seekers, current and future CTE students to support recruitment and retention.
  - Connecting "supply" (workers) and "demand" (employers) in real time.
  - Developing locally tailored resources, shared labor market information and coordinate regional strategies.
  - Provide technical assistance to employers to help tailor work to attract talent.
  - Work in collaboration with ACCD and regional partners on relocation work to provide career counseling, employment and non-employment referrals, spearhead out-of-state recruitment efforts, support program organizational design and implementation efforts.
- (b) Relocation Support Specialists: local relocation support specialists provide career counseling, employment and non-employment referrals, make warm handoffs, and remain part of the relocation team for any individual until they are no longer needed.



VDOL will also now provide employers with out-of-state recruitment efforts such as hiring events and following up on coordinate, targeted outreach. As part of this effort the Department would also participate in job fairs and other events, as both a coordinator and a participant. Additionally, VDOL is expanding its technological systems to support case management, customer and information management, data collection, information bank, and reporting requirements. As part of this process, the solution will integrate functionality that will enhance communication and information exchange about prospective out-of-state jobseekers, recruitment efforts, and prospective relocators. The funds designated under the program will support the following efforts.

- Funding for existing staff to charge time and expenses to this account while providing relocation services.
- Updating system requirements and associate costs with adapting future CRM to operate for relocation assistance tracking.
- Onboarding a services administrator dedicated to helping employers connect with out-of-state jobseekers. This person will also serve as VDOL's program liaison/manager for relocation activities and participates in planning, organization design, and implementation efforts.
- Onboarding of an event coordinator to spearhead all out-of-state activities (i.e., job fairs, Ft. Drum initiatives, targeted recruitment events, etc.)

## **2. Paid Work-Based Learning & Training (WBLT) Program (\$1m base budget)**

Combines the current internship and returnship programs within the Department with this increased investment to support Vermont's workforce and employers through:

- Funding paid 6-to-12-week work-based learning and training opportunities
- Targeting individuals graduating from post-secondary or secondary CTE program, individuals navigating a career change or need pre-employment support and connecting them work paid work experiences.
- Further enhancing Vermont JobLink to detail work-based learning and training (WBLT) opportunities.
- Providing employers with technical assistance to develop and implement meaningful WBLT programs that lead to full-time employment.

## **3. Apprenticeship Expansion Funds (\$1m carryforward)**

During the 2021 session, the legislature appropriated \$2MM to the Department for apprenticeship expansion activities. To date, the Department has not fully spent this appropriation and is seeking to carry forward up to \$1MM for the following work:

- Reimburse employers for the cost incurred for work tools and personal protective equipment for new apprentices (up to \$300 per participant).
- Continue the work to expand registered apprenticeship programs and participants.



The Workforce Development Division has hired an Assistant Director to oversee the Apprenticeship Program. With this, the Department is confident that this money can be invested to bring new energy to the Apprenticeship program at a crucial time in Vermont's COVID recovery.

