

TESTIMONY

Testimony To: House Commerce and Economic Development

Respectfully Submitted by: Heather Bouchey, Deputy Secretary of Education

Subject: H.377 - An act relating to the creation of a public-private partnership with Advance Vermont to increase postsecondary attainment in Vermont

Date: February 23, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on H.377.

Advance Vermont is framed around a laudable goal of improving postsecondary credential attainment among Vermonters. We agree that work in this broad area needs to continue—Vermont needs champions for postsecondary credential attainment. We need cultural brokers—in addition to our hard-working school counselors—to directly help families and students, especially new families and students to Vermont, understand the postsecondary education and training landscape. And we need communication materials that directly assist families and students with understanding and making choices about career pathways after high school. We support any of these efforts and are hoping the General Assembly will attend to them; they are not directly within the purview of AOE (or VDOL) responsibilities but are critically needed to advance our state’s economy and vitality.

The current bill does not focus enough on these critical gaps. In fact, as written, H.377 presents a significant risk of destabilizing and thwarting the work that VDOL, through its required partnerships with other state agencies and community organizations, and the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) are directed to undertake to enact the State WIOA plan. Summarized below are excerpts taken from Vermont’s federally approved WIOA plan to elucidate this point:

>>Goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including preparing youth and individuals with barriers to employment and other populations. **(WIOA requirement)**

Goal 1: Connect Vermonters to the education, training, and supportive services needed to enter and advance along a career pathway that leads to greater financial independence.

Goal 3: Increase the number of Vermonters with barriers to employment who complete high school, earn a post-secondary credential - including an industry-recognized

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certificate, registered apprenticeship, or post-secondary degree program - and become employed in occupations that align with the needs of Vermont's employers.

Goal 4: Improve Vermont's workforce development system by continuously aligning, adapting, and integrating workforce education and training programs and career and supportive services to meet the needs of all customers.

The State will assess the overall effectiveness of the workforce development system in the following ways: **(WIOA requirement)**

7. The State Workforce Development Board's Policy Committee will be working to establish a common set of workforce system performance measures that public and private stakeholders can look to in evaluating how well Vermont is meeting its labor force education, training, and employment needs.

Vermont's WIOA Strategies (required)

Strategy A: Publish and share information describing education, training, and skill development opportunities with the public and related service delivery providers in a customer-friendly format.

Strategy B: Collect and review labor market, education and training, and workforce service delivery data by gender, age, race, ethnicity, and disability status.

Strategy D: Develop and coordinate shared professional development opportunities, best practices, and approaches to counseling individuals in entering and advancing along career pathways.

- Increase awareness among secondary school and career and technical education (CTE) counselors about the variety and availability of employment opportunities available to ensure that students' personalized learning plans are informed by broad exposure to careers, including non-traditional careers for women, minorities, and individuals with disabilities.

State Board Functions. Describe how the State board will implement its functions under section 101(d) of WIOA (i.e., provide a description of Board operational structures and decision-making processes to ensure such functions are carried out). (WIOA requirement)

The Vermont State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) is a majority-business board, appointed by the Governor, with members representing all sectors of the economy and all geographic regions of the State. In addition, board membership includes top officials from State agencies and education and training institutions, representatives of labor and special populations, and members of the Vermont legislature. The Chair of the SWDB is appointed by the Governor from among the business membership. The SWDB advises the Governor on the development and implementation of a comprehensive, coordinated, and responsive workforce education and training system. Vermont is designated as a Single State Local Area and the SWDB is designated as the State and Local Workforce

Development Board under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Under Section 101(d) of the WIOA, the SWDB assists the Governor in the following functions:

- Review of statewide policies, statewide programs, and recommendations on actions to align workforce development programs to support a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system, including the review and provision of comments on the State Plan, if any, for programs and activities of One-Stop partners that are not WIOA core programs;
- The development and continuous improvement of the workforce development system, including:
 - Identification of barriers and means for removing barriers to better coordinate, align, and avoid duplication among the programs and activities carried out within the system.
 - Development of strategies to support the use of career pathways for the purpose of providing individuals, including low skilled adults, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment (including individuals with disabilities), with workforce investment activities, education, and supportive services to enter or retain employment.
 - Development of strategies for providing effective outreach to and improve access for individuals and employers who could benefit from services provided through the system.
 - Development and expansion of strategies to meet the needs of employers, workers, and job seekers, particularly through industry or sector partnerships related to in demand industry sectors and occupations.
 - Development and continuous improvement of the One-Stop Center delivery system, including assistance to the One-Stop operator, partners, and providers through planning and delivery services (including training and supportive services) to support effective service delivery to workers, job seekers, and employers. *(Note: VDOL IS the current One-Stop Center in Vermont; using this federally required phrasing for other work or initiatives can be confusing to many.)*
 - Development of strategies to support staff training and awareness across programs supported by the system.
- Development and updating of comprehensive state performance accountability measures, including state adjusted levels of performance, to assess the effectiveness of the state's core programs;
- Identification and dissemination of information on best practices, including best practices for:
 - Effective operation of One-Stop Centers, including business outreach, partnerships, and service delivery strategies, including strategies for serving individuals with barriers to employment.

- Effective training programs that respond to real-time labor market analysis and make effective use of direct assessment and prior learning assessment to measure an individual's prior knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences and evaluate such skills and competencies for adaptability to support efficient placement into employment or career pathways.
- Development and review of statewide policies affecting the coordinated provision of services through the state's One-Stop delivery system, including the development of:
 - Policies relating to the appropriate roles and contributions of entities administering One-Stop partner programs within the One-Stop Delivery System, including approaches to facilitating equitable and efficient cost allocation in the system.
- Development of strategies for technological improvements to increase facilities access and the quality of services and activities provided through the One-Stop delivery system, including such improvements to:
 - Accelerate acquisition of skills and recognized post-secondary credentials.
- Development of strategies for aligning technology and data to enhance service delivery and improve efficiencies in reporting on performance accountability measures, including performance accountability measurement and reporting processes;
- Development of the statewide workforce and labor market information system;
- Development of other policies that may promote statewide objectives for, and enhance the performance of, the workforce development system.

In addition to the functions required under section 101(d) of the WIOA, the SWDB is tasked with the following duties:

- Conduct an ongoing public engagement process throughout the state that brings together employers and potential employees, including students, the unemployed, and incumbent employees seeking further training, to provide feedback and information concerning their workforce education and training needs; and
- Maintain familiarity with the federal Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and other economic development planning processes, and coordinate workforce and education activities in the state, including the development and implementation of the State Plan required under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, with economic development planning processes occurring in the state, as appropriate.

Strategy A: Publish and share information describing education, training, and skill development opportunities with the public and related service delivery providers in a customer-friendly format.

Representatives from VDOL, AOE, and VR are all participating as a cohort Vermont's credential attainment team along with ten other states, supported by the ETA, OCTEA, and OSERS. As processes for defining, recognizing, and coordinating credential attainment materialize, VDOL anticipates including this information along with eligible training provider (ETP) and registered apprenticeship (RA) information through its online systems.

It's likely that there will be small progress made by other community partners in culminating and organizing the information around trainings and apprenticeship opportunities before all the information will be located in one place in a customer-friendly format.

VDOL is in a ten-state consortium called American's Job Link Alliance (AJLA) to develop and maintain cost-effective workforce technology to support the delivery of VDOL workforce programs. The consortium is currently supporting an extensive update of the system – which includes its job board, ETP, and RA functionalities. Further, the VDOL is completing Phase 1 of a three-phase procurement process (required by the state) to competitively bid our information management systems in 2021 and 2022 to meet short- and long-term needs. The VDOL plans to involve other departments, agencies, and public and private workforce partners in developing the RFIs and RFPs that will be part of this procurement.

Strategy B: Collect and review labor market, education and training, and workforce service delivery data by gender, age, race, ethnicity, and disability status.

The state workforce board and core partners will be working together in program year 2021 and 2022 to identify which data points serve as the more effective indicators of outreach and success in making services more inclusive and helping more underrepresented people participate in Vermont's labor force.

Strategy D: Develop and coordinate shared professional development opportunities, best practices, and approaches to counseling individuals in entering and advancing along career pathways.

Career counseling occurs at local schools, post-secondary education institutions, through WIOA programs – including VR, VDOL, and AEL – and through many other state and local organizations. Over the next four program years, Vermont intends to convene career counselors at different levels and serving different populations throughout the state. Through a series of meetings, partners hope to gain insight into best practices, learn more about how and where counseling can be accessed, and develop a plan for coordinating information and high-quality counseling better.

System improvements might include: creating resource directories, streamlining service delivery models, sharing best practices, identifying common professional development opportunities, and developing shared principles or approaches to providing career advice. In addition to the core partners, AOE's secondary school career services providers, the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC), the Community College of Vermont (CCV), VDOL's labor market information specialists, and key community organizations will be invited to help develop and participate in a shared plan for improving career development and guidance.

An intentional focus of work under this strategy will be to Increase awareness among secondary school and career and technical education (CTE) counselors about the variety and availability of employment opportunities available to ensure that students' personalized learning plans are informed by broad exposure to careers, including non-traditional careers

for women, minorities, and individuals with disabilities. VDOL and VR will support this work, particularly as it applies to connecting guidance systems and opportunities that help individuals' transition from secondary education into post-secondary education, training, or a career. <<

Conclusion

In effect, we already have a “public-private partnership” charged with exactly the activities contemplated in H.377 – the State Workforce Development Board. We recommend that entities wishing to contribute to this policy space are directed to the SWDB, which includes members of the General Assembly, to develop working partnerships, align goals, and best foster collaborative efforts.

Finally, AOE cautions the committee about the reality of setting up another “public private partnership” in the education space. Although these setups are typically billed as supportive and helpful to state agency activity, the reality falls short. AOE staff will need to attend to new work and demands from a non-regulated entity, will be forced to siphon resources from work that should be laser-focused on education recovery in the next 1-2 years, and will potentially lose staff who are beleaguered by the continual request for new work, new partnerships, and new data demands separate from what is already required by our funding mechanisms (i.e., federal regulations). We do not support this bill as written. We are happy to consider language that would address the critical needs in this space, as outlined in the first paragraph of