

To: Vermont House Committee on Education

From: Melissa Connor, Director of Stafford Technical Center – Rutland, Vermont

Date: February 15, 2022

Re: Written Testimony Regarding H.483

Good afternoon and thank you for the invitation to speak with you today. My name is Melissa Connor and I am the Director at the Stafford Technical Center in Rutland. I began my career in career and technical education here in Vermont back in 1994 as a Business teacher at the Technical Center at Springfield, now the River Valley Technical Center. In 2015 I transitioned to the role of Assistant Director at Stafford and then to the role of Director in 2019. Other than 6 years that I spent in Massachusetts, my entire career has been in career & technical education here in Vermont. During this almost 30-year span there have been many changes in CTE but many things have stayed the same, including the governance model and our funding structure for CTE.

As part of my testimony today, I was asked to comment on two questions related to this matter: How do you think it's working? What barriers and challenges do you see, and how could it be improved? I think this question varies greatly by center. I am fortunate to work at a CTE center that has a very supportive host district and Regional Advisory Board which includes the Superintendents and School Board members from our partner high schools. Our Regional Advisory Board is comprised of active members that serve on sub-committees that meet regularly. They know what is happening in our center, they ask questions, they provide feedback, and they work to improve our school and opportunities available to students. With that said, I know that this is not the case statewide.

The governance structure of CTE in Vermont does need to be reviewed but I feel that we need to pull together representation of all CTE centers, including administration and board members, to discuss these exact questions. I do not feel that a "one size fits all" approach to governance is beneficial due to the varied communities and regions that we serve. What works at one center well may not work at another due to the regional needs. At Stafford, we are fortunate to have programs that are over enrolled with wait lists each year. We have a large pool of students to draw from within our region, unlike some of other centers around the state. We have a diverse group of employers that seek out our students. Again, this is not the case for all centers. What may help one center could potentially hurt another which is why careful consideration of the potential impact of governance changes needs to be considered before changes are made.

In regards to funding I do believe that we need to change the current model so that partner high schools are not hurt financially when a student chooses to attend a CTE center. As part of the flexible pathways, students should be able to flow between their high school and their regional tech center without interference. The current system results in unintended barriers for our students. Every school is wrestling with providing the best educational system for their students within a fiscally responsible budget. It is challenging for our partner high schools to fund all they need at their high school when money is following their students to Stafford. A funding

formula that would not “penalize” a high school for sending students to a CTE center would be extremely beneficial for everyone and could even open the door for more partnerships.

In my opinion, the current funding system is just one barrier. Other barriers include varying high school graduation requirements, varied grading systems, transportation challenges, and the inability to compete financially with the private sector in recruiting teachers for high demand fields. These factors reduce the number of students that can access our center and the number of students we can educate to fill openings that are needed in our regional and state workforce.