



April 18, 2024

Chair Ram Hinsdale and the members of the Senate Committee Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs:

On behalf of Advance Vermont, I am pleased to offer a letter of support for the policy proposals underlying H. 707. As the Committee knows well, Vermont is currently grappling with a workforce crisis, with 2.7 open jobs for every unemployed worker. Even when applicants do apply, employers often struggle to find individuals possessing the requisite skills for the positions available. Moreover, lagging postsecondary aspiration and continuation rates threaten the recent growth in Vermont's postsecondary attainment rate, which is a key indicator of the skills of the workforce.

While Vermont boasts a robust workforce system comprising numerous hard-working state and non-state agencies and organizations, this complex web of stakeholders has resulted in a fragmented landscape lacking in cohesive coordination. This fragmentation undermines the collective impact and efficacy of the workforce system.

Throughout its history, Advance Vermont has engaged extensively with stakeholders to identify challenges hindering postsecondary attainment and workforce development. A clear and consistent theme from these discussions is the urgent need for the State to build capacity to align and coordinate programs, harness data to inform statewide strategies, maximize the allocation of resources, and capitalize on emerging opportunities to strengthen the workforce system.

H. 707 answers that call. The Office of Workforce Expansion and Development will bring additional expertise, coordinating capacity, and accountability to the state's workforce development efforts. It is a tall task, and the new Office needs to be given the authority to make it happen.

The reduction in the size of the State Workforce Development Board coupled with the support and expertise of the Office and the empowerment of the Board's executive committee, will enable the Board to operate as a nimble and well-informed governing body more capable of providing visionary leadership to the workforce system.

The prompt implementation timelines for establishing the Office and restructuring the Board reflect an acknowledgment of the urgency of the issue, balanced with the thorough two-year analysis conducted by the Special Oversight Committee on Workforce Expansion and Development. However, there is a notable misalignment in Section 4, where the establishment of a working group to recommend statutory changes regarding state workforce leadership and duties would push the codification of these changes to the 2026 legislative session. Such a delay risks impeding the timely implementation of the Office and the full realization of the role of the Board, hindering their ability to effectively address the many challenges and opportunities in fostering a top-tier workforce in Vermont.

Thank you for your consideration and for the Committee's continued good work on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Cheney', is written over a white background.

Tom Cheney  
Executive Director, Advance Vermont