

Testimony in Support of Bill S.313

Date: April 22, 2026

To: Members Of The Commerce and Economic Development Committee and Secretary Saunders

From: Devon P. Karpak, Technology Education Instructor

Good morning, members of the committee, and Secretary Saunders. Thank you for having me here today. My name is Devon Karpak, and I am the Technology Education Instructor at Otter Valley Middle and High School in Brandon, Vermont.

My credentials are wide-ranging, including a diploma from WyoTech in Automotive and Street Rod Fabrication to Master's Degrees in Vocational and Technology Education. My relationship with Career Technical Education (CTE) started over 22 years ago when I enrolled in the Diesel Technology program at the Patricia A. Hannaford Career Center. That was one of the most meaningful decisions I ever made; everything that followed was directly influenced by that choice. I am forever grateful to the teachers there, whom I eventually came to call my peers.

The Current Landscape: An Uneven Playing Field

You may notice that I am not presenting myself strictly as a CTE instructor. While I am endorsed in that area, I am not currently practicing as a CTE teacher. In fact, that is where many of these issues begin: an uneven playing field.

Currently, in Vermont, some students can access CTE programs as early as ninth grade, while others must wait until eleventh grade. Some students can explore these fields adequately from seventh grade through the time they apply to a center. Furthermore, some centers are directly connected to a student's high school, while others are 30 minutes or more away. Not to mention our students with special education supports. The environment that would engage them the most is one where they are stuck between the supports of their home school and the center, adding layers of complexity and limiting access.

On the other hand, many students have access only to programs like mine, which operate in a "liminal space"—not officially CTE but focused on engaging students in technology, making, and future careers. This space between "old industrial arts" and modern STEM/career-focused programs has done a great deal of good, but it is not equal, it is not fair, and we can do better.

As Vermont educators, we pride ourselves on "pathways," but often we provide experiences and simply *call* them pathways. True pathways must have a destination. A traditional diploma and a "hope" for what happens after high school is not enough; we must connect our courses to after high school and the world of work. CTE does that, but our students need more support and more access.

Support for Bill S.313

I am here today to testify in support of Bill S. 313, an act related to the transformation of Vermont's Career Technical Education system. I bring with me the endorsements of:

- **Rene Sanchez**, Superintendent of RNESU
- **Matthew Hildebrand**, Supervisor of Secondary Special Education for Otter Valley

- **Jill Doody**, Communications Coordinator for RNESU

Our team has been working with **Transcend Education** under a Rural Education grant to improve our career-connected learning. We believe that with the passage of S.313, we will be better able to connect our students with courses and opportunities that keep them engaged, improve graduation rates, provide more college and career opportunities, and reduce the behavioral struggles we have faced for years. With this bill's passage, our schools and CTE Centers can begin the hard work of building a contiguous career readiness system. This is a true chance for our pathways work to have support and ultimately meaning.

Increasing Flexibility and Access

S.313 will provide students, administrators, and instructors more flexibility regarding where CTE takes place. It will:

- Allow students to access courses and exploratory programs sooner.
- Allow programs to be more integrated where it makes the most sense for the student.
- Better prepare students to make informed choices for their futures.

Students make choices based on graduation requirements, course offerings, access, and personal ambitions. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard students perform the "calculus" of weighing these factors and ultimately opting out of a CTE path. Worse yet are the students who have no plan for life after high school because we couldn't support them in exploring their futures early enough. These students are the ones who keep me up at night. Those who do not or did not have the support in place to access career-oriented education. This is what is at stake with educational reform: the future of Vermont's students and, by extension, the future of Vermont itself.

A First Step Toward Equity

While this bill contains a great deal of good, we must remember that as stewards of the public's trust and treasure, we must ensure we have metrics to judge if these changes are effective. I encourage you to ensure that the bill explicitly includes data-gathering devices before final passage. First, serving every Vermont student demands it. The S. 313 vision promises access "regardless of geography, identity, or school"—a claim that can only be verified through disaggregated enrollment, waitlist, and completion data across every CTE center and sending district. Without such data, disparities remain invisible and unaddressed. Second, the workforce-alignment goal explicitly references Vermont's Most Promising Jobs and VT Labor Market Information—existing infrastructure that must be formally linked to student outcome tracking through postsecondary transitions, credential attainment, and employment. Third, the General Assembly needs accountability data to distinguish structural change from surface compliance, particularly for flexible delivery models, credit-awarding practices, and governance reforms that could otherwise drift without explicit and transparent oversight. Without this infrastructure, Vermont cannot determine whether transformation occurred, whether students actually benefited, or whether public investment produced measurable results.

This bill is a vital first step toward a better, more equitable system where students are truly prepared to enter the workforce, begin apprenticeships, or attend college. S.313 is not perfect, and as I noted, it is only a first step—but it is a step we must take for our students and the future of Vermont.