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TO: Senate Committee on Education  
FROM: Dr. Nicole MacTavish, Superintendent/Director, Patricia A. Hannaford Regional  
Technical School District.  
DATE: May 20, 2025  
RE: Testimony on H.480 Amendment for Career Technical Education

I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today about the future of Career Technical Education in Vermont.

I come to you with an eclectic background, in that I have been an educational leader for over 25 years, in 4 states, and in three countries. For most of my career I have served in public school districts, but I have also led in the charter school world, in the private school sector, in the military world, and in several non-profits.

As our active-duty Navy family moved around the world for 20 years, I had the opportunity to serve in districts of all kinds; small, medium and large districts, districts with rich resources and those with little, rural, suburban and urban districts, homogenous and diverse districts, and international districts. The smallest district where I served had under 200 students, the largest, over 26,000.

I have had the opportunity to lead at the building level, as both a middle school principal and a high school principal, as well as at the district level as a Curriculum Director, a Special Education Director, a Career Technical Education Director, an Assistant Superintendent, a Deputy Superintendent, a Chief Academic Officer, and a Superintendent.

I also come to CTE from the Economic Development sector. I have served on Economic Development councils at the state level in three different states, and currently serve on the Board of the Addison County Economic Development Council, as well as the Board of the Addison County Chamber of Commerce.

I understand the worlds of preK-12 school districts, career technical education, and economic development. I know where they overlap well, working in concert with one another, and I understand the tensions that sometimes arise in the systems.

I give you this background only to set the stage for my comments today, and to open the door to reach out after today with any questions.

The amendment you are considering today has the potential to clear the path for hundreds more Vermont high school students across the state to access Career Technical Education, without building new CTE centers, without changing district boundaries, and without raising taxes.

Allowing and encouraging students to access CTE programs where there is space available is good for kids, good for communities, and good for Vermont.

That is why everything we are discussing today is already allowed and encouraged by the State of Vermont, and why Senator Hardy has brought this amendment forward – not to change H.480, but to emphasize entitlements already held by Vermont's students and families.

**CTE is Public Education:**

- In Vermont a student is entitled to enroll in a CTE program if they meet all the following criteria:
  - They are a Vermont resident.
  - They are at least in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, or at least 16 if homeschooled.
  - They do not yet have a high school diploma.
  - They apply.
  - They meet the admissions criteria for the technical center.
  - They are accepted to the technical center.
- CTE is an entitlement for students, an intentional choice of language.
- The intent, then, is to make CTE widely available to students.
- Based on the CTE service regions currently in place, students who live in some areas of Vermont have far greater access to CTE than others.
  - Some centers, like Hannaford Career Center, have more spots available than resident students can fill.
  - Some centers are full, having more resident students applying than there are spots available. This creates competition, and limits access.

**Service Regions – a.k.a. 'Boundaries':**

- CTE Centers are organized within 16 regionally defined service regions. These regions are established through State Board rule 2370.
- Service regions are somewhat county based, although in Addison County a number of towns, including Orwell, Goshen, Leicester, and Whiting are located in Addison County, but are not in the service region of Hannaford Career Center.
- CTE Centers serve students who live in our service regions, and transportation to CTE centers is organized by the sending school districts within those regions.
- This means that if a student attends a CTE center outside of their assigned service region, that student has to provide their own transportation.

Hannaford Career Center:

- Our service region includes the Addison Northwest, Addison Central and Mount Abraham School Districts.

- All three of these districts, combined, give us a service area containing 1191 resident high school students. This means Hannaford Career Center's service region includes:
  - 3 school districts
  - made up of 17 towns
  - with a total of 1191 resident high school students.
- We serve 1 in 3 high school students in our region. Our current enrollment is 347 high school students, out of 1100, 32%.
- In the last 15 years, our community has passed 2 bonds, totaling over \$11 million, to modernize and expand the Hannaford Career Center.
- As a result, Hannaford Career Center has room for 250 more students, in a completely modernized facility.
- It does not make sense for students in our region to be turned away from CTE, when the Hannaford Career Center can serve them.

#### Rutland County:

- To our south, the service region of Stafford Technical Center is significantly larger than Hannaford's. Stafford's boundaries contain:
  - 7 school districts
  - serving 32 towns
  - with roughly 2100 resident high school students.
- Stafford's CTE Director recently testified before this committee, sharing that she had 447 applications for only 278 available seats.

#### Chittenden County:

- In Chittenden County, to our north, there are two CTE Centers, Center for Technology Essex, and Burlington Technical Center, each with large service areas.
- Between Burlington Tech and the Center for Technology Essex, the service region includes:
  - 9 high schools, including three of the largest in the state.
  - 7000 resident high school students, six (6) times more students than Hannaford Career Center's service region.

#### **Why this is important:**

- Roughly 50% of high school graduates in the state of Vermont go on to college or university.
- Ensuring that students can move into high-skill, high-wage, high-demand careers, while also having the option to stay in Vermont, it's critical not only to our students' success, but also to our communities, and to Vermont industry. CTE is that pathway.
- Until Vermont's housing shortage is behind us and our wages catch up, we will not be able to attract enough skilled labor to either replace retiring experts, or fill new opportunities created by thriving industry.
- By 2030, 1 in 3 Vermonters will be over 60.
- Skilled tradespeople and technical experts are retiring in droves, and not nearly enough young people are stepping in to these critical and high-paying careers.

- When we are operating at an unemployment rate of less than 3%, we need every student graduating, ready for their next step in education or training.
- Vermont needs a realistic pathway for young people to stay in Vermont, pursue careers that communities depend on, and earn wages high enough to live sustainably, support a family, and afford a home.
- CTE is good for students, good for communities, and good for the economic future of Vermont.
- This amendment would strengthen existing language, to align with legislative intent. It would clarify the need for collaboration between educational entities to support students.
- More students in our region would have access to CTE as soon as next school year.
- This amendment is specific in intent – to serve students who otherwise would not be served.
- Sending school districts would see a decrease in per-student tuition, with more students accessing a fixed cost CTE system.
- Business partners would have access to more trained technical graduates.
- More graduates would have a pathway to settle, work, and raise a family in Vermont.

### **Concerns Raised:**

Below are some concerns raised about this amendment, and thoughts around each one.

- This is already allowable:
  - This amendment would strengthen existing language, to align with legislative intent.
  - Despite the fact that everything currently in this amendment is already allowed in Vermont, out of 347 students at the Hannaford Career Center, we have only 1 student this year who came to us after denial from another CTE Center. That 1 student is related to a teacher at Hannaford Career Center.
  - If the language already exists, and we know students want to take CTE, but no students or families are actually taking advantage of these provisions, clearly there is some barrier in the system, conflicting with the legislative intent.
  - This amendment would clarify the need for collaboration between educational entities to ensure student and family outreach, and student access to CTE.
- Students change their minds:
  - Concerns have been raised about sharing waiting list names because students may change their minds about taking a CTE class.
  - The application process for CTE centers is not an easy process. It is not a casual decision for a student to apply, or to successfully navigate the process to acceptance.
    - While the exact requirements vary by CTE center, students generally have to complete a written application, which includes essays or narratives explaining why they want to attend, and why they have chosen a specific program.
    - The application also generally includes transcripts, attendance records, and approvals or recommendations from families and school personnel.

- Students also often have to go through an interview process for the CTE center or the specific program.
  - If the student has an Individual Education Plan, they and their family have to IEP meeting both before application, and after acceptance.
  - The process is lengthy, time consuming, and rigorous.
  - At our center, we have not found that students completing the application process subsequently change their minds.
  - We do find that barriers occur from their sending high schools' scheduling which prevent students from enrolling in CTE. However, we find a student committed enough to complete the CTE application process continues to want to take CTE.
- Students Denied from one CTE Center Should Be Denied at Others:
  - Concerns have been raised that a student denial by one CTE center should be upheld by other CTE Centers. This argument is problematic on a number of levels.
    - CTE centers have differing admissions requirements.
    - A center which is full, and turning students away, might implement more stringent admissions requirements than other centers.
    - A student may qualify for one center, but not another.
    - The premise that a decision of one team at one center should determine the fate of a student anywhere in the state is concerning.
    - When students apply, for example, and are rejected by one college, or one employer, that does not mean they should subsequently be rejected by all of them.
  - We find in CTE that problematic behaviors many students exhibit in regular K-12 settings either do not manifest at all, or are significantly diminished, in the CTE setting. The CTE setting's unique characteristics resonate with many students, who excel once given the chance to attend.
  - I would be happy to share story after story of students who have turned their trajectory completely around after coming to the Hannaford Carrer Center.
- Transportation:
  - Concerns have been raised that this amendment states CTE centers 'may' provide transportation.
  - Senator Hardy was careful here, to intentionally use the word 'may,' not 'shall.' This distinction is also in current Vermont law.
  - CTE centers, then, have the choice to support transportation for students outside their region, if there is a logistic and financial pathway for them to do so.
  - No CTE center is being required to transport students outside their service area.
- FERPA:
  - Claims have been made that sharing student information violates FERPA.
  - This is incorrect.
  - Both the State of Vermont and the federal government clearly state that it is not a violation of FERPA to share Directory Information, including student names and addresses. As anyone who has a high school student knows, colleges and

military recruiters regularly access this information to reach out to students and families.

- Concerns have also been raised that protected student information such as IEP data or attendance information would be shared across centers, raising FERPA concerns.
- This is incorrect. There is nothing in this amendment asking or requiring centers to share protected information. If a student applies to a CTE center outside their service area, they would complete an application in the same way as any other applying student.
- This amendment clarifies the sharing of Directory Information only, such as student names and addresses, between CTE centers, so that CTE centers can reach out to students who would otherwise not have access to CTE.

**Bottom Line:**

- Thanks to support from all sectors of our community, the Hannaford Career Center serves students in a newly remodeled building, and a modern purpose-built second campus. Subsequently we have room for more students than reside in our service district.
- At the same time, hundreds of students are being turned away from CTE to our region because their CTE centers deliver a fantastic education, but are simply at capacity.
- Our larger Vermont-wide interest is to ensure more students take more CTE more of the time.
- As part of the larger work ahead by this committee and others, it seems likely there will be movement on CTE service regions, to better align them with the number of resident high school students.
- However, we do not have to wait. We have the opportunity to expand student access to CTE as early as next school year, and to do it without the need for capital outlay.
- Career Technical Education is public education. Students are entitled to public education, and to CTE.
- CTE is a rare bipartisan effort. We all recognize the importance of CTE to students, and to Vermonters. I urge you to reaffirm students' access to these life changing programs.

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