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Testimony to the Higher Education and Employee Advancement Committee in Support of:

PHB 6472 An Act Establishing A Tax Credit For Graduates Of Institutions Of Higher Education In The State.

PHB 6891 An Act Concerning A Deduction From The Personal Income Tax For Student Loan Interest.

PHB 6883 An Act Concerning A "Corrections To College" Pipeline For Youthful Offenders

RHB 7089 An Act Concerning The Funding And Expansion Of Certain Advanced Manufacturing Certificate Programs

PSB 607 An Act Concerning Apprenticeship Pathways To Earning A Bachelor's Degree.

Good Afternoon Senator Haskell, Representative Haddad, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

My name is Elizabeth Fraser and I am the Policy Director of the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote equity and economic success for children and families through both policy and program initiatives.

In addition to our policy work, CAHS has a history of providing financial capability coaching, and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance for low income individuals throughout the state. Through this side of our work, we understand the struggle folks have with holding debt of any kind, and how difficult it can be to reduce this burden.

Student loan debt, much like a mortgage, has long been considered “good debt.” The opportunity provided through the loans holds the promise of a bright future, higher wages and long term opportunity.

However, since the Great Recession, rising college costs and stagnant wages upon graduation have changed the impact of the student loan debt on students, families, and the state.¹ Soaring student loan debt and high upfront costs are a barrier to increased educational attainment. In fact 57% of Connecticut residents carry student loan debt, averaging \$38,510², giving Connecticut the distinction of having the highest average debt burden per person in the nation.

Student loan debt hinders not only the ability of the student to be financially independent, but it also impacts our economy. Research shows that student debt impacts individuals’ ability to buy a house, start a family and participate fully in the economy. In addition, excessive debt often curtails a student’s ability to go on to graduate school.³ Moreover, parents who have cosigned loans for their children are considered financially responsible and are burdened from the debt implications against their credit, often just as they are considering retirement.

CAHS is very interested in these proposed bills and believes that they have the potential, either individually, or in conjunction, to provide some relief to students who find they are starting out with more debt than they can manage.

¹ <https://www.deptofnumbers.com/income/connecticut/>

² <https://ticas.org/posd/state-summary>

³ <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/student-loan-debt-crisis/>

However, recognizing the pitfalls of student debt and employing strategies to mitigate the economic crunch on young workers is just a first step. To fully address Connecticut's economic need for a strong and available workforce, we ask that you consider a *system* of post-secondary opportunity that builds on existing structures. It is encouraging that this committee is also considering many proposed bills that capture the need to address the cost of higher education while providing varied, yet targeted pathways to prosperity.

“Apprenticeship to Degree” programs have some great potential, especially for those who are non-traditional learners, or who need to work and earn an income while going to school. The possibilities for growing a workforce with this type of approach can be very useful to economic growth and filling needs within sectors of employment. Apprenticeships are often associated with a trade or with manufacturing, but we need to think creatively. An “Apprentice to Degree” program opens up many other opportunities to grow a workforce and meet the needs of students. For example: for many years there has been a state statute in place with a timeline requiring all early childhood educators to have a bachelor's degree by a certain date. Centers have struggled to hire and retain staff with these credentials. As a result the legislature has been forced to push the deadline back repeatedly. A structured apprenticeship program could provide a means for associate degreed teachers to work towards their bachelor's degree while working in the classroom, resulting in a pipeline for a strong early childhood workforce.

Funding and Expansion of Advanced Manufacturing Certificate Programs is an important step to building a ready workforce and growing our economy and allowing families to prosper. A Connecticut Business and Industry 2017 Survey of Connecticut manufacturing Workforce Needs indicates that there were about 13,000 manufacturing job openings at the end of 2018.⁴ Other job sectors including education, transportation and healthcare will also need to grow their workforces in the coming years. These jobs provide good wages for workers, and the opportunity for future growth, but we need to have the training in place to fill them. These programs, whether credit bearing or not, should be carefully structured to meet the needs of both the business growth and the needs of the applicants.

“Corrections to College” Pipeline As always, CAHS advocates for policies and programs that are inclusive those that are harder to serve, and have historically been left behind during times of economic opportunity. Youthful offenders fall into this category. We know from brain science that human brains take about 25 years to become mature. It is unreasonable to believe that we can imprison a young person, have them experience the humiliation and trauma of being locked away, and then force them to venture into the world with few or only short-term supports. The proposed bill has a strong start, and includes initial components that are designed to repair and prepare youth for the future. There are several ideas that are especially compelling. Fatherhood classes are so valuable, providing insight and understanding of the needs of children in relation to the needs of the parent. Consider too that young moms facing re-entry might need some similar supports. Additionally, two-generation strategies have efficacy in that they provide supports for the parent that are transferable to the child. We can change the trajectory of a family by investing in the parent and child together. Providing supports for the children of incarcerated parents should be considered to help heal the family unit.

Youth mentor programs can also be a strong source of support for those re-entering society. Social workers are important source of support, but additionally, a trained peer may have a greater understanding of the difficulties surrounding re-entry, guide their person through obstacles, find resources, and provide much needed encouragement.

Individually, each of these proposed and raised bills— and others such as debt free college and loan forgiveness— have much merit, will help to increase opportunity for students, and support economic development, and reduce the burden of student debt. Hopefully one or more will pass this session.

However as an agency dedicated to the reduction of poverty, and committed to increasing equity and economic mobility, CAHS urges this committee to consider a holistic, systemic approach to post-secondary opportunity. It should assess and address student outcomes, not program outputs. It must be accessible to

⁴ https://www.cbia.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Mfg-Workforce_17.pdf

many types of learners from diverse backgrounds, consider those who lack the skills to begin post-secondary opportunities, address barriers to completion, and not be cost prohibitive. It is a lot, and will take time, but it is clear that to grow our workforce and economy, Connecticut must take courageous steps to ensure that students can access post-secondary education and training, and gain employment, without incurring crippling debt.

(The attached document was given in testimony to this committee and includes additional thoughts to consider as these programs are being developed.)

Additional thoughts For the Consideration of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement

In Connecticut, 8.5% of adults 18-64 do not have a high school degree/GED, and 26.3% only have a high school degree.ⁱ Within the next 10 years, an estimated 70 percent of Connecticut jobs will require postsecondary education or specialized training, signaling higher wages and an uptick in economic activity which cannot be manufactured through corporate and upper-bracket tax cuts.ⁱⁱ However, in order to reap those benefits and enable working families to get ahead, our state must deliberately and courageously invest in policies that allow low-income earners and workers with lower levels of educational attainment to participate in our economy.

The initial context of many bills being considered by the Higher Education Committee hold the promise of this type of investment in our next generation of workers, their families, and Connecticut's economy. We realize there will be much to add to the bill language. With December unemployment at 3.2% every available worker must be included in our workforce equation.ⁱⁱⁱ As these bills are considered and language is written we ask that your committee considers several points.

Consider those that have been left behind. Connecticut is home to many who graduated from high school, or achieved high school equivalency, but still lack the skills necessary get into the educational or training programs that will enable economic mobility. CAHS believes that additional “developmental education” opportunities should be made available to students who need to brush up on skills, or need more intensive remediation. Without the additional academic supports accessible through developmental education, once hopeful students are excluded from participating in higher education or quality training programs, and are often left to piece together a “survival income” in low-skill, low-pay jobs. Without upward movement into higher income brackets, families remain in need of state assistance, employers remain without a skilled workforce, and Connecticut suffers.

Consider the circumstances of being the working poor. In addition to academic proficiency, we know there are legitimate reasons that students leave community college without a degree, or without completing a training program. As students work in school to be successful, they often face challenges that are difficult to overcome without supports that are not within their reach. Managing unpredictable work schedules, lack of childcare, undependable transportation, and surviving the daily struggles of poverty all contribute to the inability to be successful in higher education. This paradigm is inequitable, leaves our poor and low-income students behind, and needs to be addressed. There are ways to overcome these obstacles; some students might benefit from mentorship programs, a trained peer to guide them through the obstacles, find resources, and provide much needed encouragement. Other states have implemented mentorship programs, with a good example being the Tennessee Promise mentorship program.^{iv}

Consider the next generation.

Emerging scholarship emphasizes the importance of two-generational initiatives that specifically ensure children and adults in the same household receive targeted services, track and foster accountability for shared outcomes for children and adults, and incorporate stakeholders in both education and workforce development.^v This “whole family approach to work” is a model being looked at across the country, and much work is being done in our sister New England states.^{vi} The economic well-being and stability of parents is essential for children's early development and long-term social-emotional, physical and mental health outcomes, educational attainment,^{vii} and future earnings potential.^{viii} The conditions of low-wage work and poverty, which may be intensified by a lack of paid parental leave, unpredictable and non-standard scheduling^{ix}, reduced access to educational training opportunities, reduced parent-and-child quality time, and increased parental-stress and morbidity, can negatively impact the development of young children.^x The ability of parents to progress toward greater economic stability is through workforce development, education, and training is dependent upon the well-being of their children. There are different ways to

include childcare in the equation of workforce development. One option, which is up for consideration this session, is to extend Care4Kids eligibility to include adult education, advanced education, and training opportunities.

Providing high quality training and education is key to ensuring Connecticut has the skilled workforce needed to grow the economy, and expand opportunity for all of Connecticut's employable citizens. Investing in policies that allow low-income earners and workers with lower levels of educational attainment to participate meaningfully in our economy requires vision and intent. However, the time is right in Connecticut for that type of smart investment

ⁱ Working Poor Families Project 2018 data

ⁱⁱ , <https://www.courant.com/business/hc-biz-connecticut-jobs-20180705-story.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/laus/lmi123.asp>

^{iv} <http://www.tnpromise.gov/volunteers.shtml>

^v Chase-Lansdale, P., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2014). Two-Generation Programs in the Twenty-First Century. *The Future of Children*, 24(1), 13-39. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23723381>

^{vi} ACF Region 1, NCSL, Colorado

^{vii} Shonkoff, J. P., Garner, A. S., Siegel, B. S., Dobbins, M. I., Earls, M. F., McGuinn, L., ... & Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), e232-e246.

^{viii} Ascend at the Aspen Institute, Two Generations, One Future: Moving Parents and Children Beyond Poverty, The Aspen Institute, 2013, <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/ascend/Ascend-Report-022012.pdf>.

^{ix} Joshi, P., and Bogen, K. "Nonstandard Schedules and Young Children's Behavioral Outcomes Among Working Low-Income Families," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69 (2007)

^x "Working Conditions and Parents' Ability to Care for Children's Preventive Health Needs." *Journal of primary care & community health* (2013); Alina Salganicoff et al., Women and Health Care in the Early Years of the Affordable Care Act, 2014, Kaiser Family Foundation. <http://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/8590-women-and-health-care-in-the-early-years-of-theaffordable-care-act.pdf>.