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**Testimony before the Labor and Public Employees Committee in Support of
H.B. No. 6508, AN ACT CONCERNING INVESTMENT IN THE CONSTRUCTION JOB
WORKFORCE FOR LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS.**

February 14, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, Members of the Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 6508, An Act Concerning Investment In The Construction Job Workforce For Low-income Residents.

My name is Kayla Goldfarb and I am a Policy Analyst for 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.

This bill would create a construction career path for low-income resident and ensure successful employment through a twenty-five per cent hiring requirement in state construction contracts. CAHS strongly supports this bill, and believes this could be a concrete step toward addressing needs of low-income residents to obtain family supportive-employment while supporting the growth of our state's infrastructure.

A construction job career path could offer low-income residents stable employment and earning opportunities. Projections from the Connecticut Department of Labor estimate that the construction industry is projected to add over 4,000 jobs to the state economy by 2026. With Construction Laborers earning an average of \$46,000 annually per DOL tabulations of 2018 Quarter 1 wages, it is clear these are jobs that can support families moving toward greater economic security. Additionally, as many jobs within the construction industry do not require an advanced degree, they offer avenues for career growth for individuals looking to engage in career-focused training or technical programs, rather than immediate postsecondary programs.

There are also successful examples upon which the Committee can build an impactful program, leveraging the experiences of existing construction workforce programs to reduce poverty by connecting low-income residents to family-sustaining employment, particularly in our cities. Leaders involved with the Waterbury Good Jobs Ordinance have submitted testimony to this Committee today, and CAHS defers to their knowledge of how to model and administer an effective construction career pathway program. In particular, we would like to highlight that the Waterbury's Good Jobs Ordinance requires contractors in publicly funded projects to "make a good faith effort" to hire 30% city residents including residents of color and women. This component is particularly crucial if this proposal seeks to ensure that these workers, often under-represented in the construction workforce, have access to good paying jobs.

In supporting this innovative piece of policy, CAHS would like to ask the Committee to consider two additional elements that may amplify the potential impact of such a career path;

First, CAHS would ask that this Committee consider the needs of these low-income residents for additional supports, including access to affordable high-quality child care, transportation assistance, or even assistance in completing remedial education programs as means to increase participation and retention in a career pathway program. Managing unpredictable work schedules, lack of childcare, undependable transportation, and surviving



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the daily struggles of poverty all contribute to the inability to be successful in training opportunity and higher education. This paradigm is inequitable, leaves our most low-income students behind, and needs to be addressed.

Census data published in CAHS 2018 Kids Count data book shows that 22.5% of single-mom families with kids have no employed parent, compared to 14.2% of single-dad families and 2.1% of married couple families. 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. These adjustments which would more accurately address the needs of workers in the context of their families could also increase the ability of such a program to seed multi-generational prosperity.

Second, CAHS asks that the Committee consider how such a program might encourage predictable, regular scheduling for the individuals participating in such a career pathway. Unpredictable scheduling makes it harder for the working-poor to get and stay ahead, trapping many Connecticut families in a cycle of multigenerational poverty. When work schedules change unexpectedly, working families may struggle to find reliable childcare, navigate transportation, pursue an education, or secure a second part-time job, which ultimately harms family stability and economic security. Research also shows that work-family conflict and work stress are worsened by irregular shift scheduling, and that unpredictable scheduling practices disproportionately early-career hourly employees of color, as well as women. Finally, when household income changes drastically due to unpredictable work hours, families may find themselves pushed over the “benefit cliff” as they lose eligibility for critical safety net programs before they have truly achieved a measure of economic stability.

Analysis from the Economic Policy Institute in 2015 found that roughly 9 percent of construction jobs subject workers to irregular scheduling. CAHS also conducted original qualitative research, including focus groups and individual interviews with low-income families who had experienced a benefit cliff. Many of the parent participants cited that construction work, though well-paying when it was available, was a contributing factor to their income variability and economic instability as their households often swung back and forth over the income eligibility line for various public benefits. We would ask that in considering the merits a construction career path, that the Committee consider how providing for regular scheduling could make these jobs more family-supportive.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of increasing opportunities for low-income workers to obtain family-sustaining employment through a career pathway to jobs in the construction industry.