

A BETTER WAY TO A PROSPEROUS CONNECTICUT

Workforce Development & Jobs

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Kevin Kelly
Senate Republican Leader

Paul Formica
Senate Republican Leader Pro Tempore

WE MUST PUT SUCCESS, JOBS AND OPPORTUNITY IN REACH FOR ALL.

Connecticut is dead last in the nation in job growth (1) and income growth (2). Young people in Connecticut are graduating to an unemployment pool of over 100,000 people. Generational poverty is a pervasive problem in our state, especially in our cities. Income growth is not keeping up with the cost of living. These are unpleasant truths, but we must be honest about our state's weaknesses so that we can improve.

Connecticut has the "worst performing economy among all 50 states - dead last."

Fred Carstensen, University of Connecticut economics professor and director of the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis.
June 2021

Connecticut lags significantly behind the rest of the nation when it comes to our economic recovery following the pandemic. Connecticut is also experiencing a K-shaped recovery and people at the lower end aren't experiencing what those at the top are. Economic output in Connecticut contracted 4.1% in 2020, compared with the nationwide reduction of 3.5%. Connecticut never fully restored the jobs lost in previous recessions, and in 2020, the state again experienced deeper job loss compared to the rest of the country.

This problem isn't new for Connecticut. For the last decade Connecticut Democrats' policies controlled our state and created the environment we are in today. Democrats have failed to create the quality jobs people need to build a ladder out of poverty. Their policies made Connecticut more unaffordable, a problem worsened because income growth has not kept up with our state's absurdly high costs on everything from taxes to energy to housing to health care.

The solution is not more of the same. It's not more government and more taxes. That Democratic strategy has only made the rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and hindered the growth of opportunity and jobs we need to help people up and out of poverty.

"The U.S. is on track to close its current job shortfall in about nine months...Connecticut is on track to close its current shortfall in about 23 months."

Patrick O'Brien, Author, CT Voices for Children "State of Working Connecticut" report

There is a better way. We must create an environment where all jobs in all parts of our state can grow and thrive, where employers can afford to support good paying jobs, and where all young people have an opportunity to access good paying jobs.

1) Connecticut Department of Labor & Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (November 2020)
2) PEW report (April 2021)



OUR PATH FORWARD

- 1) Pipeline To Work**
- 2) Workforce Development Path to Career**
- 3) Health Care Academy**
- 4) Return of Job Fairs**
- 5) Vocation Programs Recruitment**
- 6) Taskforce to Study Occupational Licenses**
- 7) Provide Career Opportunities for Veterans**
- 8) Buy CT to Build CT**
- 9) Grow Jobs in Flagship Industry**

PIPELINE TO WORK

Require the State Department of Education to partner with stakeholders to develop the Pipeline for Connecticut's Future program. The program will include development of best practices for local school districts to create pathways to obtain occupational licenses, apprenticeships or immediate job skills through partnerships with local businesses.

In today's world, receiving a bachelor's degree is no longer a guarantee to employment upon graduation. Overall, 43% of college graduates are underemployed in their first job. In addition, higher education is a path that is not for everyone. Instead of focusing only on college preparation in our high schools, we need to expand our approach in high school to show students that there is a future and there are good jobs even if you don't see college in your future.

This proposed program would provide a direct pipeline of qualified employees by incentivizing local school districts to develop partnerships with local businesses and develop curriculum to train high school students specifically for the business community's needs upon graduation.

The State Department of Education must examine existing laws and identify changes required to allow for successful partnerships, such as in school attendance requirements, counting certain apprenticeship hours as in school hours, and certification requirements. Programs should also include both industry-specific class time and cooperative work placements.

This homegrown program concept is modeled on successful programs in Wallingford and the Platt Technical High School in Milford where local manufacturers work collaboratively with the schools. While the Wallingford and Platt programs are geared specifically towards manufacturing, it is imperative to educate towards a certificate statewide. Whether it is manufacturing, computer programming, auto mechanic, culinary arts, etc. students can graduate from high school with not only a diploma but also either a certificate or with skillsets necessary to begin a career.

This model both enables companies to fill vacant positions in their workforce with an employee trained specifically for that job while providing direct employment opportunities for Connecticut youth as well promoting entrepreneurship among high school students.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PATH TO CAREER

There is a shortage of professionals in the construction and manufacturing trades. To better connect young people with opportunity, especially within construction and manufacturing trades that are experiencing a workforce shortage, we can simplify and make clear the path from secondary or collegiate level education to a professional career.

- **PART 1: Information to students.** During the 2021 legislative session, the Connecticut General Assembly passed into law a provision requiring high schools to encourage the completion of FAFSA forms. Encouraging students to apply for federal government aid in the form of grants and loans to attend a two or four year college is not the only path our high schools should be promoting. Rather, a career as a professional tradesperson is another path that will provide a lifetime of financial independence and economic stability and often without the massive amounts of student loan debt faced by attendees of a traditional college program. We propose requiring area high schools to discuss the benefits of attending a trade school alongside any discussions of enrolling at a traditional two or four year college.
- **PART 2: Financial Aid.** Allow trade schools to participate in the Roberta Willis Scholarship Fund. The Roberta B. Willis Need-Based Grant Program is open to Connecticut residents who attend a Connecticut public or non-profit private college who demonstrate financial need. Applicants must submit the FAFSA to apply. Awards are offered to full-time students in 2- or 4- year programs of study. We propose expanding access to this program to allow trade school applicants to apply for grants.
- **PART 3: Industry support.** Connecticut's apprenticeship program provides many benefits to those students lucky enough to gain entry to the program. There are state grants that pay for the apprentice's wages and tax credits available to businesses who agree to sponsor a construction or manufacturing apprentice. We propose expanding the tax credit to businesses that hire any registered apprentice who completes an apprenticeship program, not just those who complete four year programs in construction or qualified manufacturing programs with periods of 4,000 or 8,000 hours. This would open up the tax credit to seven more trades whose apprenticeship programs are only 2,000 hours: Auto Glass Technician, Barber, Oil Burner Servicer, Sewer Storm and Water Lines Installer, Energy Efficiency Technician, Lawn Sprinkler and Maintainer, Gasoline Tank Installer and Repairer.

This proposal also recommends that additional apprenticeship programs be developed to expand opportunities beyond manufacturing where possible.





HEALTH CARE ACADEMY

Connecticut is facing a shortage of health care workers, an issue exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As our state sees increasing demand in health care, we are also facing significant shortages in many areas. Health care workers are facing burn out and shortages across the nation are straining the entire workforce system. We must work to support health care workforce growth to meet the needs of Connecticut residents.

This proposal would require the State Department of Education, Department of Public Health, and Department of Labor to work with the Connecticut Hospital Association to develop curriculum for a high school "Health Care Academy" Program to include training and certification for high school graduates to work in high demand health care occupations. The program would be open to any high school to participate in to train current students to fill in demand jobs. Students would complete necessary in person training at local hospitals and obtain certification upon completion of the program, graduation, and local hospital residencies.

This program will give high school students the training and certification to obtain good-paying health care jobs upon graduation. It will also help ease the health care worker shortage by increasing the number of individuals trained and certified for in demand health care jobs.





RETURN OF JOB FAIRS

Job fairs can open students' eyes to career possibilities and help them find jobs that meet their skill sets. Connecting students to jobs early on is important to enable students to obtain employment, learn about the job search and interview process, and empower them to build a better and brighter future. This proposal would require the State Department of Education to develop guidelines for hosting successful job fairs at high schools. The Department shall also survey each high school annually as to the number of job fairs held and the results of each job fair.

VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS RECRUITMENT

Vo-tech programs offer incredible opportunities for Connecticut students. More can be done to enhance recruitment at the middle school level to attend vo-tech programs. We must ensure Connecticut's vocational-technical high schools are within reach for youth and are being discussed with students at an early age. This proposal will reestablish a vo-tech ambassador program to share information with students in middle schools to make more younger school children aware of future opportunities.





TASKFORCE ON OCCUPATIONAL LICENSES

Connecticut must ensure that our licensure system does not become a barrier to employment, starting a business, and job creation. This proposal would amend the general statutes to create a task force to study occupational licenses in Connecticut, with a focus on revising and removing barriers to employment and entrepreneurial activity.

PROVIDE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR VETERANS

Many veterans struggle to find work after returning home from service. Connecticut must continue to focus on workforce opportunities including for veterans who often enter the workforce with unique skills from their time in service. This proposal recommends enhancing the state's efforts to ensure military training and experience are eligible for application towards licensure requirements (evidence of applicant's competency in a given field) in trades and professional occupations. This includes enhancing communication and information sharing with veterans to assist them in availing themselves of equivalencies.





BUY CT TO BUILD CT

Connecticut's defense industry is a vibrant job creator and economic engine. CT has the skilled workforce and the industry leaders who can produce the best goods and services to keep our nation safe. Connecticut must do more to harness this success to spread growth throughout our state. Specifically, we must encourage the defense industry to work with in-state suppliers whenever possible and grow Connecticut jobs.

The "Buy CT to Build CT" program will incentivize defense contractors to create and support jobs. It will establish a program to provide incentives to defense contractors and subcontractors that are headquartered in the state and make long-term commitments to maintain and grow jobs in the state. It will also provide sales tax exemptions and tax credits to defense contractors that work with in-state supply line manufacturers, instead of buying parts and products from out-of-state companies. By steering defense contractors toward in-state suppliers, we can help foster relationships that will grow jobs, strengthen our communities and bring more opportunities to our state.

GROW JOBS IN CT'S FLAGSHIP INDUSTRY

Connecticut is known as the insurance capital of the world. The industry employs an estimated 48,500 people in Connecticut. We must always strive to advance and support good paying jobs in Connecticut, including jobs created by our flagship industry. This proposal would require the Insurance Commissioner to promote development of, and employment opportunities within, the insurance industry in Connecticut. It encourages the department to examine newer areas of potential insurance growth such as: insurtech, captive insurance, cybersecurity and data protection.