

Campaign for a Working Connecticut  
*Developing workforce solutions for a stronger economy*

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Good Evening. My name is Alice Pritchard and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. Throughout our 35-year history we have worked to ensure that women have access to education and job training which leads to employment that will support their families.

I am here today on behalf of the Campaign for a Working Connecticut. The Campaign shares an aligned vision: to promote the state's economic competitiveness through the development of sustainable, effective workforce solutions to increase workers' skills and advance families to self-sufficiency. The Campaign works to accomplish this goal through a unique and diverse state-wide coalition, which includes over forty members consisting of employers, education and training providers, workforce investment boards, advocates and chambers of commerce.

Did you know in the State of Connecticut that an individual must earn \$19.30 an hour, or hold 2.5 full time minimum wage jobs, to afford a two bedroom apartment? To put a face on this statistic, I recall hearing a story about a Connecticut woman who was hospitalized last year for exhaustion. She was a widow, after losing her husband in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, with three children and refused to apply for public assistance. To make ends meet, she worked three to four jobs. When she was hospitalized, her doctor told her she had to quit one of her jobs. She finally "broke down" –to use her words– and applied for food stamps and now only has to work two jobs.

This should not happen in Connecticut and with the innovative solutions already identified by the Campaign, it will not. I am here today to urge you to include in your strategic plan the following long-term investments. These are proven strategies that can be implemented immediately should the State choose to invest in its citizens.

**Basic Education.** The state must invest in basic skills and English language instruction targeted to providing individuals with the foundation skills necessary for today's employers.

- In CBIA's 2007 Survey of CT Businesses, 24% of respondents stated that availability of skilled workers was the number one concern facing their business within the next five years, only surpassed by the cost of doing business (30%).

**Occupational Skills Training.** The state must invest in building the technical skills of individuals in key workforce shortage areas for the state, including matching those transitioning from public assistance to employment opportunities.

- 60% of respondents to CBIA's Membership Survey indicated that their workforce needs were individuals with technical skills including computer, scientific, and manufacturing-related skills.

**Career Services.** The state must invest fully in its One Stop Career Centers to provide individuals and employers with access to employment and career development information and services.

- 51% of respondents to CBIA's Membership Survey indicated that their workforce needs were individuals with quality soft skills including listening skills, dependability, collaboration, adaptability, and interpersonal skills.

**Incumbent Worker Training.** The state must invest in building collaborative training, education, and skills development programs among employers and the workforce development system for those in need of basic and/or technical skill development.

- Massachusetts currently spends \$6.54 and Rhode Island spends \$16.93 per person on incumbent worker training. Connecticut trails far behind these states with an investment of only \$.16 per worker!

Connecticut's economic success ultimately will depend on its ability to consistently produce a highly skilled workforce with the prerequisite basic and technical skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. With an ever-increasing number of jobs in this state requiring at least post-secondary education and many a college degree, the barriers to employment and advancement up the career ladder are substantial for those with limited skills.

Without these skills, many individuals will be stuck in low-wage work in the dual economy and unable to meet the growing skill needs of Connecticut's employers. If employers cannot find employees here with the skills they need, they will go elsewhere. Connecticut has lost and will continue to lose thousands of young, college educated workers because they can find better, higher-paying jobs elsewhere. The state needs to invest in the Campaign's strategies to retain its place in the global economy.

We know the Department of Economic and Community Development has been charged with the critical task of developing an economic strategic plan for the state under Public Act 07-239. The Campaign for a Working Connecticut wants you to know you are not alone in this endeavor. We will support you in your mission to build a different Connecticut five, ten, fifteen, and twenty years into the future. Working together, we can create an economic security plan that benefits all of Connecticut's workers, employers, families, and communities. Thank you for your time.