



CAFCA
Connecticut Association
for Community Action

**March 9, 2021 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly's
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**

Board of Directors

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In support of

House Bill 6227: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Work-Based Learning Opportunities in Industries with a Hiring Need in the State

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Kelley Hall, and I am the Development, Communications and Grants Manager for the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), the state association that works with Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federally designated antipoverty agencies serving nearly 200,000 low- and moderate-income people in all 169 cities and towns across the state.

I am here today to express our support for House Bill 6442, *An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Work-Based Learning Opportunities in Industries with a Hiring Need in the State*.

CAAs connect their customers to essential programs and services like employment and training, housing and shelter, energy and heating assistance, early childhood care and education, asset development, and food and nutrition. Through a holistic, comprehensive, multigenerational approach, CAAs work with those in need to plan, achieve, and maintain a realistic path to short and long-term economic self-sufficiency.

Connecticut benefits when every resident has an opportunity to succeed and contribute to the economy. This is especially true for young adults in high school and college just starting out in the workforce. Yet emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, automation, and the gig economy, as well as changes in the skills employers need and want, has resulted in a "skills gap." This poses a challenge for managers trying to hire appropriately trained people for open positions. The state also continues to face a shortage of qualified applicants for middle-skill jobs in fields like advanced manufacturing, construction, and health care, and budget deficits have prevented a strategic investment in needed workforce skills development initiatives.

By 2025, approximately 70% of workers will require some level of post-secondary education or certification,¹ leaving those without a college degree or advanced credentials in lower-paying jobs or unemployed. Unless the state steps in, many will be left behind without an adequate way to make a living – further perpetuating Connecticut's glaring income inequality and systemic, generational poverty.

Community Action Agencies play a key role in workforce development efforts by intervening with person-centered services, providing pathways to resource support, and helping at-risk and vulnerable residents identify and address barriers and issues that impact access to employment. They know these efforts provide essential linkages that move people towards economic self-sufficiency. Because of the experience, expertise, and collaboration of CAAs, Dr. Monette Ferguson, Executive Director of Alliance for Community Empowerment, currently serves as Vice Chair of the Equity and Access Committee within the Governor’s Workforce Council.

Creating a task force – as this bill does – will help guide future planning around work-based learning programs, apprenticeships, and other efforts to train current and future workers. We are appreciative of the Committee’s inclusion of our organization, CAFCA, to this task force, so that we can work in concert with educators, policymakers, private industry, representatives of trade industry, and others to set Connecticut residents up for a successful future. By connecting high school and college students with work-based opportunities in industries with a hiring needs, we can help break the cycle of poverty and help people reach their full potential.

In closing, I strongly urge you to support H.B. 6227. Thank you for raising this important bill and for your time and consideration.

ⁱ Press Release, Governor Ned Lamont, “Governor Lamont forms council to ensure businesses have access to the best trained workers in the country,” October 29, 2019: <https://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/News/Press-Releases/2019/10-2019/Governor-Lamont-Forms-Council-to-Ensure-Businesses-Have-Access-to-the-Best-Trained-Workers>