

Testimony of
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House Labor and Industry Committee
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House Bill 1725

Good morning, Chairman Scavello, Chairman Keller, committee members and staff. I am Bill Bartle, the Education Policy Director for Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC), a statewide, independent, non-partisan and non-profit child advocacy organization committed to improving the education, health and well-being of children in the commonwealth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee today in support of House Bill 1725.

House Bill 1725 establishes seven CareerBound pilot programs that allow for the creation of partnerships among students, educators and employers to provide school-to-work programs, including career awareness and work-based learning. This will provide students early exposure to an array of high-priority occupations and help employers develop a pipeline of future workers with the education and skills needed for their businesses to compete and succeed.

A shortage of qualified workers exists in Pennsylvania and across the nation. Many Pennsylvania employers, even in the recent difficult economic environment, have job openings that they are unable to fill because they cannot find workers with the skills to fill the jobs. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that by the year 2020, the nation will face a shortage of more than 20 million qualified workers for the fastest-growing job sectors, including health care, manufacturing, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers.

Today in Pennsylvania, 70 percent of the jobs require postsecondary education, whether that is a two- or four-year college degree, an industry credential, apprenticeship or technical certification program. Yet only about half of the current workforce possesses that level of education attainment.

To compete successfully in today's global, technology-driven economy, Pennsylvania needs a highly educated, highly skilled workforce. To prepare our young people – both in school and out of school -- for the realities of the marketplace, and to ensure our employers have the pipeline of qualified workers they will need to prosper and grow, we must ensure that all young people have a sound academic foundation, including some postsecondary education and the career and labor market information they need to make informed decisions about their futures. Career and labor market information should include the vast array of occupations available today, what the high priority occupations are in Pennsylvania, what education and skills are required to secure those occupations, and pathways that students can take to obtain the required education and skills.

There are multiple pathways to a successful career for our young people, only one of which is a four-year bachelor's degree. The job market still has a clear place for those with a four-year degree, but the fastest

growing sector of our economy is for highly skilled, highly compensated “gold collar” workers. Gold collar workers have job-appropriate skills that are obtained by education beyond high school, but often less than a four-year degree.

But too many young people and their families don’t know about the jobs of the new economy or the high-priority occupations in their region. They don’t understand the day-to-day activities associated with the jobs, know what level of education they need to secure the jobs, or how and where to get the necessary education (or how to pay for it).

Clearly, it is critically important for both in-school and out-of-school young people to participate in meaningful career awareness and work-based learning experiences so they can explore careers and gain exposure to the world of work. This will provide students the information they need to make informed decisions about a career path. Providing these experiences to young people also can help keep them in school and on track to graduation, or re-engage those young people who have dropped out, by connecting the relevance of what they are learning in the classroom to their future life success. It also helps to motivate students to pursue postsecondary education to obtain the education and skills they need to achieve their career goals.

An important aspect of the CareerBound pilot is the inclusion of a continuum of school-to-work activities for students from middle school through high school. This begins with early exposure career awareness activities (such as career presentations, workplace tours, field trips, career fairs and career clubs) to inform young people about the high priority occupations available today. Then, in late middle school and early high school, early exposure career exploration activities that provide young people the opportunity to learn more about a high priority occupation that is related to their individual career goals are provided. In these activities (such as job shadows and career mentoring), students work with workplace professionals and participate in developmentally appropriate, hands-on work experiences. Finally, extended exposure career activities (such as internships and apprenticeships) are provided to high school students to gain in-depth knowledge about a high-priority career through a monitored work experience, in which a young person links skills used in the workplace with his or her academic learning.

PPC has appreciated the opportunity to work closely with staff on the development of this legislation. We would like to end our testimony by sharing a few ideas for minor improvements which could be made to House Bill 1725:

- PPC believes the curriculum for the pilot programs should be aligned to the commonwealth’s career education and work academic standards. These standards describe the knowledge and skills which students will be expected to know and demonstrate at specific grade levels. Therefore, it makes sense to ensure the pilots’ curriculum adhere to the standards.
- The language should be clearer that the Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) are responsible for convening the school and business partners. Developing and sustaining these partnerships is a key component to the success of the pilot programs. Adding this language will ensure there is a clear expectation of which entity is responsible for the organization and assembly of partners to meet the pilot goals.
- PPC recommends language to require the Department of Labor and Industry to coordinate information to employers and schools to help them create effective career awareness and work-based learning experiences. For instance, PPC has a free toolkit on our website that provides a “how-to guide” on developing high-quality work-based learning opportunities for youth:
<http://www.papartnerships.org/work/youth-development/toolkit>

- We recommend the application to Labor and Industry includes clear objectives, measurable goals and a timeline for the project. This will provide for a clear plan for pilot programs to follow and for Labor and Industry to hold pilots accountable.

We appreciate you taking these suggestions into consideration and for the opportunity to testify today. We are pleased Representative Mackenzie introduced this legislation and that the committee is studying it. We believe the pilot will help students and businesses and provide valuable information for making future progress in ensuring all Pennsylvania youth are career-ready.