



May 24, 2017

Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee

Testimony in Opposition to H-6186

Linda Katz on behalf of the RI Workforce Alliance

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Economic Progress Institute and the RI Workforce Alliance, a collaboration among basic skills (adult education) and training providers, labor, business, philanthropic organizations and advocates. The Economic Progress Institute is one of the facilitators of the Alliance whose mission is to support a high quality public workforce development system that meets the needs of employers and workers, especially those with limited basic skills.

While the Alliance strongly supports expanding opportunities for lower-skilled Rhode Islanders to improve their employment skills through the adult education system, we oppose the requirement in H-6186 that would direct that 10% of state funds allocated to the RI Department of Education (RIDE) for adult education be dedicated to programs that are provided at an employer's workplace. This would result in at least a \$200,000 reduction in funds for the community-based network of adult education providers, which is already facing an equal reduction due to changes in state allocations by the federal agency. The loss of funds would mean adding more Rhode Islanders to the waiting list for services.

There is certainly a significant need for the state to invest in adult education services for its residents. There are 75,000 Rhode Island adults over age 25 who do not have a high school diploma. Thirty-five thousand adults do not speak English very well or not at all, including workers with limited literacy in their native language as well as those who were skilled professionals in their home country.

The adult education programs funded through RIDE serve around 6,000 adults annually at an average cost of \$1,400/student. In 2015-2016, the majority (3,137) were English Language learners, close to 2,000 required Adult Basic Education services and the balance required Adult Secondary Education services. There is a waiting list for services comprised of 1,300 adults.

One of the primary goals of the adult education system is to support learners' employment and ability to move up the job ladder. In fact, in 2015-2016, over 40% of program participants were already working when they entered the adult education program. Programs must include employment skills in their curricula and employment is one of the program outcome measures.

The adult education system is an integral part of the state's workforce development system. There is consensus that investment in adult education is vital to ensuring that employers have the skilled workforce they need and that all Rhode Islanders have the opportunity to "make it in Rhode Island". The mix of where those services are provided – through the network of non-profit organizations that

comprise the RIDE adult education network – or at the workplace - should be determined by the Governor’s Workforce Board (GWB) as part of the overall workforce development strategy.

The community-based network offers residents access in their local communities and is open to workers, unemployed individuals and others. Workplace based adult education is convenient for employees, and some employers, like TACO, provide on-site literacy, English language and other skills training to their workers because they recognize the value of the investment. State law provides an incentive for employers to provide basic education to their employees by providing for a tax credit of 50% of the direct costs for basic education and vocational training up to a maximum of \$300 per employee, and a total of \$5,000 per calendar year. In addition, the GWB provides funding for employers who wish to offer adult education on-site through the Incumbent Worker Training Grant program.

Employers who wish to offer adult education services on-site can apply for an IWT grant and/or contract with an adult education provider in their community to provide on-site services, if there is appropriate space, release time for employees, etc. The GWB and RIDE would then be able to monitor the quality of the services and outcomes. We respectfully urge you not to pass this bill.