



**Testimony Before Senate Budget Committee
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Good morning Senator Sarlo and members of the Senate Budget Committee. It is an honor to speak to you today about career and technical education as you begin your deliberations on the 2019 budget.

Research studies, surveys, and ongoing conversations with employers all tell a similar story: there are many well-paying jobs in growth industries in New Jersey that require training beyond high school, but not necessarily a four-year degree.

But many New Jersey employers struggle to fill those jobs because they cannot find qualified candidates. As a state and as a nation, we have focused too much on preparing all students for college, at the expense of opportunities to pursue technical education that puts young people on a career pathway.

Expanding career and technical education is a key to closing this skills gap. It is a critical investment in New Jersey's future workforce that is needed to support long-term economic growth.

But additional capacity is needed to serve more students in new and upgraded career programs. County vocational school enrollment has increased by over 34% since 2000, yet thousands of students are still being turned away due to lack of capacity.

While the demand varies by county and by program, on a statewide average, there are almost 2.3 applicants for every available seat in a county vocational school. Nearly 30,000 students applied in 2018, and roughly 17,000 could not be accepted due to program capacity.

When you look at this overwhelming student and parent demand for more career-focused education -- along with the skills gap -- it is clear that we must expand CTE to prepare more young people for careers.

The Bond Act proposed by Senate President Sweeney would address this critical need by asking New Jersey voters to invest in high-quality career and technical education facilities at county vocational schools, where they can benefit secondary, college and adult students. We hope that the Assembly will favorably consider this legislation.

In the meantime, I am pleased to report that the Legislature's initial efforts to expand access to career

programs continues to produce tremendous results. The County Vocational School Partnership Grants that the Legislature has funded since 2015 have created 23 new programs in 12 counties. When fully enrolled, these new programs will serve approximately 1600 additional students on an ongoing basis.

We urge you to once again include in the budget \$3 million for these partnership grants so that county vocational schools can continue to add new programs and serve more students.

Equally important in this effort is adequate and predictable funding for public schools. We applaud the Governor's commitment to provide an increase in school aid, while acknowledging the challenge of achieving an equitable allocation that recognizes enrollment growth and provides for an inclusive review of the current funding law. We look forward to working with the Legislature as you consider changes to SFRA.

Because of their economic mission and reliance on county-based financial support, vocational school districts have unique funding needs and challenges. With limited increases in state and county support over recent years, county vocational school districts have struggled to keep local district tuition stable, recognizing that increases will discourage already struggling districts from expanding student participation in county CTE programs.

Updating the SFRA to restore per pupil aid for the excess cost of county vocational school programs would reduce the

local burden and support expansion under the proposed Bond Act.

The last issue I want to address today is the critical need for adult education. We greatly appreciate the funding that the Legislature inserted in the last three budget years to support adult high schools and county vocational school adult training programs. Unfortunately, Governor Murphy did not maintain this for his proposed 2019 budget, and **we respectfully request that you restore adult education funding to the 2018 level of \$4 million.**

A one-size-fits-all college preparatory mindset does not meet the needs of all students, and our state must provide a safety net for students who do not succeed in a traditional academic setting. High school completion and career training programs are critical in providing multiple pathways to success for young adults and others who are struggling to support themselves and their families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.