

Today, I present a voice from education to support the alignment of federal and state child labor laws and to promote educational work programs for the youth of Pennsylvania.

My name is Al Catarro and I am the coordinator of business and community affiliations for the Centennial School District in Warminster PA. The home of Rep. Bernie O'Neill. Rep O'Neill and I taught in the same high school. After he was elected to his current office, I assumed his supervisory responsibilities related to special education work programs. In addition, I am a cooperative education coordinator and have been associated with secondary

work programs for over 15 years. My educational background includes Bachelors of Science in Business Administration and a Masters of Science in Education. Presently, I am an Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Doctoral student writing my dissertation proposal on how No Child Left Behind has impacted Career and Technical Education in Pennsylvania.

Currently, career education faces many challenges from several fronts one being the disparity of Child Labor Laws for the state of PA and Federal Child Labor Laws. This legislation will remove some of the obstacles that we are facing.

Rep. O'Neill addressed one obstacle that we faced in our district with legislation adding retirement communities to section 6 of the current labor laws.

This permitted our school district to partner with a local retirement community to create a work program for developmentally disabled high school students.

The value of this program cannot be measured because we cannot duplicate the realism of a community-based program, in a classroom

As Work-based Learning Coordinators, our charge is to place students into entry-level jobs that relate to the student's career interest. There is a great deal of

background knowledge that is needed to properly complete this task. A major issue in this process is understanding Child Labor Laws and having the ability to explain them to employers. Over time there arose a common complaint from employers in my local area. It seems that the PA State and the Federal Child Labor Laws do not correlate.

This complication has consistently caused issue to the process of a structured work-based learning situation. It takes time to develop a level of trust with employers, some do not wish to invest the time, or are warned by accountants or lawyers that investing in youth is not worth the risk. Workforce

Development in PA is worth the risk and we can make it easier by revision of the PA Child Labor Laws.

Representatives from the Pennsylvania Cooperative Education Association, conducted anonymous phone inquiries to other coordinators asking for reported incidents where employers were penalized for non compliance of these laws unjustly, do to the fact that they are cumbersome and unclear. A large enough number of cases existed to take the issue further. In February of 2001, the issue was brought to the Legislative Action Committee of the Lower Bucks County Chamber of Commerce. Representative

David Steil decided to investigate and move forward with the problem at the state level.

One important segment of the law needs to be kept constant in any changes to legislation. This is the exemption clause which states:

“The Department of Labor and Industry, Bureau of Labor Law Compliance does exempt students 16 or 17 years of age from specific hazardous occupations if they are apprentices, student learners enrolled in, or graduates from an approved vocational, technical or industrial institution which prepared them for

employment in the specific occupation (see page 2 of the abstract law).

Proof of a student's enrollment in the program and that they are a student-learner in a specific occupation of study at the approved institution requires that a training agreement and training plan (cooperative education paperwork from the certified Cooperative Education Coordinators) be on file with the bona-fide cooperative education program. The hazardous order exemption only extends to the summer months between the junior and senior year if the Cooperative education coordinator is employed during the summer to supervise the student.

Additionally, when a student-learner has completed his or her training and graduated from high school/and completed student-learner requirements, he or she may be employed in the occupation for which he or she has been trained as a journeyman- even if the student is a minor and not yet 18 years of age. The youth's employment would not be subject to the restrictions of supervision and the hazardous work being performed is incidental to the training.

They would have to be employed in compliance with all the other hazardous orders that do not have exemptions until they reach the age of 18.”

This piece is to ensure the safety and security of our youth in the workplace, while starting the workforce development pipeline with our youth in our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and thank you Rep Steil for sponsoring this piece of legislation.