

**Statement of**

**Rachel V. Smith**

**Executive Director**

**Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation - CPWDC  
(Central Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board)**

**130 Kelly Square, Suite 1**

**Lewisburg, PA 17837**

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## **Introduction**

Good morning. I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. My name is Rachel Smith and I am the Executive Director for the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation, which is the nonprofit corporate entity of the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board. This workforce board serves a nine-county region that includes Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder and Union counties.

The continued growth of Pennsylvania's economy, and in turn Central Pennsylvania's economy, is dependent on a well-educated workforce that can respond to the current and future demands of our key industries. For the past decade, the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board has focused on collaborating with the region's 31 school districts to improve and enhance connections between business and education to ensure that all youth leave high school with an understanding of who they are in relationship to career pathways, how to get a job, how to keep a job and how to create a job opportunity through entrepreneurship.

Whether speaking with groups of educators or engaging with business leaders, the messages we hear are clear. Educators know the importance of industry input to keep academics relevant. Businesses understand the pressures that our schools are under to do more with fewer resources; they want to be at the table, interacting with teachers and students, providing the reality check of life after high school. However from our experience, sustainable business education partnerships are most successful when supported by an objective convener, who can break down language barriers, who can bring best practices to

the forefront of discussions, who can make the behind-the-scenes connections and who ideally can leverage resources to implement evidence-based initiatives.

In the mid-1990s, through federal seed money from the School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994, 55 School to Work partnerships existed across Pennsylvania. After five years, many partnerships were forced to shutter successful programs and in some cases disband completely when the funding was exhausted. In the mid-2000s, many partnerships found themselves reinvigorated by the availability of Regional Career Education Partnership (RCEP) funding. Across our region, the Workforce Investment Boards served as the intermediary, leveraging those resources to focus on five areas: 1) engaging employers to become champions for career education at the school district level; 2) supporting the development of transferrable lesson plans to embed career development, awareness and regionally relevant material into classroom activities; 3) coordinating regional employer-based activities that complement classroom learning like career fairs, job shadowing, teacher in the workplace, internships and summer camps focused on science, technology, engineering and math; 4) providing routine and relevant information on careers, high demand occupations and the regional economy; and 5) gathering support for employer endorsement of regional initiatives like School Counts! and WorkKeys to increase the number of students working toward credentials that supplement the high school diploma. Again, when the RCEP funding stream was discontinued, many partnerships did not have means to sustain activities, although the importance of business and education partnerships only grows.

The introduction of CareerBound through House Bill 1725 provides the foundation for long-term sustainability of these critical relationships. The Central Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board supports the legislation based on the following four tenants. First, the

legislation clearly recognizes the role of local Workforce Investment Boards in convening business and education partnerships. As objective intermediaries, local Workforce Investment Boards do the work of organizing and connecting while businesses and educators focus on their core business strengths and come together with a clear purpose. Second, the legislation recognizes that effective career development cannot be a “once and done” approach, but is more effective when students experience layers of interconnected exposure and experience that move from general career awareness to specific career goal setting as the students approach high school graduation. Third, the legislation recognizes that public funding is not the ideal mechanism for partnership building, rather business contributions create an infrastructure for sustainability and accountability. Finally, the legislation allows for local flexibility in program development to reflect the needs of communities, the culture of the school districts and the commitments of the business leaders.

I hope that what is intended to begin as a pilot program reaching one-third of the Commonwealth’s workforce investment areas will quickly prove successful and generate significant interest from the business community so that all local areas can access tax credits “to improve opportunities for student through career-oriented education, bolster cooperative relationships between educators and employers, and reduce high school dropout rates by connecting students with career opportunities at an early age.”

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.