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**Written Testimony
Comptroller Kevin Lembo
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Concerning

S.B. 837: AAC Apprenticeship Opportunities for High Growth, High Demand Jobs

Senator Bye, Representative Haddad, Senator Linares, Representative Staneski and members of the Higher Education Committee:

Thank you for raising this legislation and for the opportunity to show my support for expanding opportunities for middle class workers, and focusing on our state's high growth sectors.

Apprenticeships in skilled trades and manufacturing have created a ladder to success for many workers in Connecticut. Learning a skill or trade alongside an experienced mentor, or within an established company, is an excellent means of beginning a new career. Using the benefit of focused, hands-on experience, apprenticeships often develop into well-paying, middle class jobs. Applying these same opportunities to high-growth and high-demand employment sectors will allow for more future employment opportunities.

A skills gap exists in Connecticut. Businesses in thriving sectors are looking to hire, yet often struggle to find candidates with the necessary skills. Apprenticeship programs will help employers find and train workers who can meet the specific needs of an evolving economy.

The result will be a knowledgeable, skilled and stable pipeline of workers specifically qualified for our state's needs. According to the US Department of Labor, 91 percent of trainees completing an apprenticeship program are still employed nine months later.

This legislation would study the feasibility of developing partnerships to provide more apprenticeship opportunities to high school and college students, specifically focused on high growth, high demand jobs. We are fortunate to have world-class educational institutions in our state. Our colleges and universities, along with our local high schools, have demonstrated an exceptional ability to prepare students for future careers. Arranging for better, more direct, partnerships with the business community would expand on the influence of educators and give our young residents a jumpstart on a career, at home, in Connecticut.

Creating clear connections between our educational institutions and the state's growing industries will benefit both our young residents and our business community, encouraging businesses to stay and grow in Connecticut and helping to retain our young skilled workers.

In addition to the important set of requirements the task force is required to evaluate under the existing bill language, it should also consider workplace diversity in designing apprenticeship programs. Increasingly, Connecticut's school age population is more diverse than the population at large. Ensuring that children of all backgrounds and geographies have access to training and job opportunities is important to ensuring the long-term success, not only of these programs, but of the state as a whole.

In the 21st century economy Connecticut is in fierce competition to maintain and grow a talented workforce. Other states have already begun successful apprenticeship programs that are preparing the next generation of workers in high growth fields. Connecticut cannot be left behind.

We continue to seek ways to retain our younger population, ease the operations of local businesses, and grow our state economy. This proposal advances all of those goals.

I urge your support. Thank you.