



The Bell Policy Center

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Skilled Worker Outreach, Recruitment and Key Training Act

House Bill 15-1276

Testimony to the House Business Affairs and Labor Committee
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My name is Frank Waterous, and I am a senior policy analyst with the Bell Policy Center. The Bell is a non-partisan, non-profit research and policy organization founded on progressive values and dedicated to expanding opportunity for all Coloradans.

The Bell Policy Center supports House Bill 15-1276. The matching grant program established through the bill will help connect more Colorado youth and working-age adults with programs that offer the skilled-worker training and education needed for successful participation in our state's 21st century workforce. It will also help Colorado employers meet their pressing need for employees ready to fill the skilled positions required for business productivity and growth.

HB 15-1276 addresses two persistent and interrelated gaps in our state: a skills gap and an information gap.

First, the bill addresses Colorado's skilled-worker gap. Many positions in key industries go unfilled every year because of the lack of potential employees with the post-secondary skills and training to fill them. This gap is most pronounced in Colorado's "middle-skill" area – that is, jobs that require some post-secondary education but less than a four-year bachelor's degree. As a 2011 report prepared for the Skills2Compete-Colorado campaign by the National Skills Coalition highlighted, our state has a structural shortage of middle-skill workers. These positions account for 47 percent of Colorado's jobs, but only 36 percent of Colorado workers have the training to fill them – a gap that threatens to undermine our state's economic growth and innovation.¹ **HB 15-1276 directly addresses this middle-skill gap by targeting funds to programs focused on that area.**

Second, the bill addresses an underlying information gap for Coloradans seeking skilled-worker training. One of the underlying causes of our state's skilled-worker gap is an information gap for youth and working-age adults seeking education and training opportunities. Both the annual *Colorado Talent Pipeline Report* and the *Skills for Jobs Act Report* are outstanding products that help provide critical statewide data. But it remains a challenge for Colorado citizens to "connect the dots" and know what educational, occupational, apprenticeship and similar programs exist that offer the necessary training to fill those jobs. **The WORK Grant Program established through HB 15-1276 will ensure**

that skilled-worker training programs have the resources they need to identify, recruit, enroll and prepare Colorado youth and working-age adults for employment in high-demand occupations and industries in our state.

As the Working Poor Families Project notes, “post-secondary education is increasingly central to America’s ability to compete in a global marketplace, to the productivity of employers and to the livelihood of individual adults who hope to earn family-supporting wages.”² And as the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation states, “Educational attainment is the single most important element in job and income growth” and is one of the chief underpinnings of a strong economy.³

By helping to better connect aspiring employees, the skilled-worker programs that train them and the employers who need them, HB 15-1276 will help ensure a better future for us all. The Bell Policy Center supports HB 15-1276. We thank Representatives Pabon and Williams for bringing it to you today and we urge you to support the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony with you. If you have any questions, or if I can provide further information, please call me at 303-297-0456 or email me at waterous@bellpolicy.org.

Endnotes

¹ *Colorado’s Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs: Meeting the Demands of a 21st-Century Economy*, National Skills Coalition, written for the Skills2Compete-Colorado campaign, Oct 2011, <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/assets/reports/s2c-colorado-report-2011.pdf>. The Bell Policy Center is a member of the Skills2Compete-Colorado coalition.

² Hilliard, Tom, *Graduating to College: Three States Helping Adult Education Students Get a College Education*, The Working Poor Families Project, Policy Brief Summer 2012, http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/policybrief-summer2012_2.pdf. The Bell Policy Center is the Working Poor Families Project’s Colorado state partner in its efforts to better prepare America’s working families for a more secure economic future.

³ *Toward a More Competitive Colorado: Executive Summary on Competitiveness*, Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation, Nov 2009, http://www.metrodenver.org/files/documents/news-center/research-reports/TMCC_V_ExecSumm.pdf