



The Bell Policy Center

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Mobile Learning Labs Workforce Development

House Bill 15-1271

Testimony to the House Finance 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 15-1271. The bill allows, but does not require, Colorado Existing Industry Training Program moneys to be used to fund Mobile Learning Labs that provide flexible, on-site skills-training options for Colorado employers and employees. **Mobile Learning Labs can help working-age adults acquire the education and skills needed for employment or advancement in high-demand jobs, help employers fill the critically needed skilled positions that are the foundation for business productivity and growth, and help our state enhance its economic strength and competitiveness.**

Working-age adults face many challenges in pursuing education and skills training to advance or enhance their careers.¹ Along with the availability of quality childcare, among the most difficult challenges to overcome are *time* and *distance*: time, because adult learners often must juggle work, education, and family responsibilities; and distance, because training opportunities can necessitate travel beyond the transportation resources available to them. Mobile Learning Labs directly address and reduce the challenges of time and distance and support working-age adult participation and success.

Along with its benefits for employees, **on-site training also helps employers develop the skilled workforce they need for business growth and competitiveness — especially in “middle-skill” jobs that require some post-secondary education and training, but less than a four-year degree.** Mobile Learning Labs have a proven record of effectiveness both in Colorado and in other states² in providing hands-on training for specific operations without interrupting a company’s production schedule.³ Training sessions can be flexibly scheduled during or after different work shifts, including nights and weekends, which mutually meets the needs of employers and employees.

Based on these combined outcomes, Mobile Learning Labs are a perfect fit with the purpose and goals of the Colorado Existing Industry Training program. The program is jointly administered by the Colorado Community College System and the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade and is designed to “increase transferable job

skills that support both the company's competitiveness and enhance workers' resumes and long-term employment opportunities."⁴ **HB 15-1271 is the needed link to allow funding from the program to support this innovative and effective training delivery option.**

While expressing our support for Mobile Learning Lab funding, we would also like to make a recommendation for program administrators and employers to consider: Beyond providing training and skills development for current employees, **mobile labs also represent an important opportunity to connect with and train "aspiring employees" in the local community who are enrolled in adult education and literacy programs. We strongly urge that, whenever possible, partnerships with local adult education providers are included in Mobile Learning Lab plans so that these adults can gain the skills needed to become full participants in our state's 21st century workforce.**

In closing, we would simply observe that by serving the needs of Colorado employers and employees, **HB 15-1271 strengthens our state's economic competitiveness as well.** As the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation notes, "Educational attainment is the single most important element in job and income growth" and is one of the chief underpinnings of a strong economy.⁵

The Bell Policy Center supports HB 15-1271. We thank Representatives Lontine and Hamner 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 "Who is the Adult Learner," Southern Regional Education Board, http://www.sreb.org/page/1397/who_is_the_adult_learner.html; Caschera, Kristen, "Three Most Significant Challenges Facing Adult Students, *The Evollution*, <http://www.evollution.com/opinions/significant-challenges-facing-adult-students/>

² See for example "PCC among national award finalists for developing mobile learning labs," Pueblo Community College (Colorado), Dec. 05, 2014, http://www.pueblocc.edu/News/PCC_among_national_award_finalists_for_developing_mobile_learning_labs/; "New manufacturing mobile learning lab unveiled," Mohave Community College (Arizona), Nov. 20, 2013, <http://blogs.mohave.edu/mohavewire/press-release/new-manufacturing-mobile-learning-lab-unveiled/>; D'Amico, Diane, "Group's mobile learning labs teach manufacturing skills," *pressofatlanticcity.com* (New Jersey), Aug. 19, 2014, http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/education/group-s-mobile-learning-labs-teach-manufacturing-skills/article_2129fba6-27f1-11e4-9e6f-001a4bcf887a.html

³ McKay, Heather, et.al., "Colorado SECTORS Initiative: Pueblo Manufacturing Collaboration," prepared for the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment by Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations, March 2013 Case Study, <http://smlr.rutgers.edu/eerc/colorado-sectors-initiative>

⁴ "Colorado FIRST/Existing Industry Customized Job Training," fact sheet, Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, <http://www.advancecolorado.com/funding-incentives/incentives/job-training-grant-programs>

⁵ *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