

Testimony of
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Chairman Amedore, Chairman Martins and members of the Taskforce, good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to testify today. I am Mark Eagan, President and CEO of the Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber (Chamber). As you know, the Capital Region Chamber of Commerce is the newly formed umbrella entity of the Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber and the Chamber of Schenectady County. Integration of the two chambers will occur over the coming months. As the parent company of these two long standing and prominent affiliate chambers, the Capital Region Chamber will be the voice and advocate of our 3,000 members representing 140,000 employees. As the CEO of this new Capital Region Chamber, and with our President, Chuck Steiner, I am proud to lead this chamber and we are excited to continue our work to shape policies, ideas and opportunities to improve the business environment in the Capital Region. Our goal is economic prosperity – for our members, our region and our community.

The Chamber recognizes how important talent is to economic development, and we work to:

- Assist local employers in recruiting bright, new talent to our region;
- Retain graduates from our local higher-education institutions;
- Increase awareness of our community assets among young professionals;
- Provide professional development programs to enrich the employees of our business.

We make several resources available to both employers and job seekers including:

- Job and Volunteer Openings (JobZone)
- The Campus Road Show
- Young Professionals Network
- Executive Mentorship Program
- Leadership Tech Valley
- Business Intern Partnership
- BusinessU

The Chamber knows all too well that the economic prosperity throughout the state is hindered by the current and continuing employment gap. The middle-skill jobs gap is stunning in terms of its share numbers. Currently, there are over 115,000 available jobs in New York State. In the Capital Region alone, there are over ten thousand available jobs. Sadly, too many of these vacancies go unfilled because employers are unable to find employees with the skills required for these jobs. Too be sure, it is disheartening for job

seekers to see thousands of job openings yet not have the required skills to get hired. It is also frustrating for employers who are in desperate need of mid-skilled employees to see their job vacancies go unfilled. Without these mid-skilled employees, employers are finding it difficult, if not impossible, to successfully meet their demands, maintain productivity and, in short, conduct business.

Unless we come up with practical solutions to address the employment gap, we could be looking at 350,000 unfilled mid-level skilled jobs by 2020. Clearly, as government, education and business leaders, as partners with a common goal, we must encourage and support those programs that have been successful in reducing the employment gap. Additionally, we must look towards new and creative means in which to provide our state's job seekers with the skill sets that are required by today's and tomorrow's jobs. Matching employees with employers is not just a goal, it is an absolute economic necessity. In order for this state, and from my perspective the Capital Region, to remain competitive, retain current businesses, attract new businesses, and ultimately ensure the economic prosperity of all New Yorkers, we must have a larger pool of middle-skilled employees. Given the ever widening gap between skills and jobs, there can be no doubt that we must provide job seekers with both the pathways to skills and the actual skills necessary to get hired.

Today, I want to share with you the Chamber's perspective on how we believe the current employment gap can be bridged. I'll highlight what we believe can work, what we currently see out there as successful programs and what we recommend for consideration.

The Chamber strongly supports education models that better prepare students for entry into careers and/or college. Career and college ready students are critical to regional job growth and prosperity.

The Chamber is an advocate of innovative education models and multiple pathways. We believe that not every student will succeed by following the traditional education pathway and consequently should be given every opportunity to pursue other avenues to graduation. Multiple pathways will improve New York State's graduation rate and will ensure that our students are college and/or career ready upon graduation.

The Chamber also encourages efforts to improve science, technology, engineering and math education. The current and future jobs in our science and high-tech industries, those jobs that are so important to Tech Valley, require workers with skills and knowledge that only STEM education can provide. Likewise, our local colleges and university, particularly our engineering and polytechnic schools, will expect their potential candidates for admission to have received a rigorous STEM education.

In addition to multiple pathways and STEM education, the Chamber is fully supportive of New York's P-12 Common Core Learning Standards. Today's businesses require employees that are critical thinkers, complex problem solvers and effective communicators. The CCLS prepares today's students to effectively fulfill each of these roles. We must continue to change the focus of our curriculum from low-level skills like rote memorization to higher-level skills like critical thinking. Through CCLS, we can align the skills of our students with the requirements of our colleges and businesses.

The Chamber is a strong advocate for increased funding for community colleges for the purpose of customized industry training. Community colleges have been a great business partner. They have and should continue to play a vital role in addressing the employment gap. During the Taskforce's recent forum in New York City, I was pleased to hear Johanna Duncan-Poitier, Senior Vice Chancellor for Community Colleges and the Education Pipeline

for SUNY, reiterate SUNY's support for its partnerships with businesses. SUNY's commitment to providing certificate programs and non-credit courses that are designed in cooperation with industry is vitally important. Vice Chancellor Poitier's and SUNY's efforts to train and retrain our workforce so that members of our community can obtain meaningful employment must be supported and funded. I commend Chancellor Zimpher and Vice Chancellor Poitier, and I look forward to our continued partnership.

The Chamber believes that the Taskforce should look to existing programs that have shown success in reducing the employment gap. For instance, Tech Valley High – Albany was established in partnership with business, labor and government. In fact, the Chamber is a proud business partner of the high school. Tech Valley High is a regional public high school that incorporates technology, business expertise and STEM programming. TVHS offers project-based learning which is both hands-on and student-centered. By bringing together dozens of higher education and business partners, the high school provides its students with the opportunity to work with experts in the field. TVHS has been amazingly successful. Of four graduating classes, the vast majority graduated with a Regents diploma and all students were either accepted by a college or entered the workforce, with some joining the military.

The Taskforce should also look to the New York State Pathways in Technology College High School (NYS P-TECH) as a successful program. Like Tech Valley High, this program is a public-private partnership. Currently, there are 26 NYS P-TECH partnerships statewide, with three located in the Capital Region. An additional 10 will be opening this September. Each school is a collaboration between local school districts, businesses and a community college. P-TECH focuses on preparing students for high-skills jobs in technology, manufacturing, healthcare and finance. This six-year program combines high school, college, and career training and targets academically at-risk and disadvantaged students. The public-private partnership which has shaped P-Tech has allowed industry to have a direct role in developing a program that provides students the necessary skills for today's and tomorrow's jobs.

Finally, I want to encourage members of the Taskforce to review the ReadyNation's report entitled *Closing the Job Skills Gap with New York Workers*. ReadyNation is an umbrella organization of business leaders, including the Chamber, whose purpose is to strengthen business and the economy through effective investment in our youth. This report contains a three-point plan to bridge the skills gap.

The employment gap is a real and troubling dilemma facing employees and employers alike. Unless it is addressed now, the gap will steadily and rapidly widen. It is incumbent upon all stakeholders to develop solutions and support existing programs that will bridge the gap between skills and jobs. I am encouraged to see the many partnerships between business, education and government leaders that have formed to tackle this gap. And I truly believe that the best, most effective and innovative solutions will be produced by these partnerships. The Taskforce would be well served to encourage and assist these efforts. The Chamber, along with our many partners, have a vested interest in bridging the employment gap. In short, the Capital Region, its businesses and our community can only thrive if our workforce is equipped with the skills required for today's and tomorrow's jobs.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide the Chamber's perspective and I would welcome your questions.