

Testimony Before the Joint Senate Labor and Industry and Education Committees

Spanish American Civic Association/SACA Tec Centro

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

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Community based workforce development centers are emerging in urban areas where marginalized communities are deprived of opportunities for adult learning and advancement.

Community workforce development centers, working in partnership with vocational schools, community colleges, and employers provide the best avenue for addressing the issues of unemployment and underemployment- especially in communities of color. Those most marginalized in our community.

State agencies must be able to work with community groups seeking to develop workforce development centers in their communities.

As policy makers and legislators, you can be of help to underserved communities by requiring state agencies to actively work with community-based organizations in the establishment of workforce development centers. Currently, such efforts and commitments within state agencies are marginal or not in evidence.

At present, within state agencies, that sensitivity or competence is not in evidence. And this issue must be addressed promptly and collaboratively since it is so vital to our marginalized communities.

The CareerLink by themselves cannot address the complete needs of marginalized communities which require opportunities for the underemployed as well as the unemployed.

Vocational institutions and community colleges cannot address the workforce development needs of these communities through their 2-year and 4-year offerings.

Community based organizations are not able by themselves to address fully the workforce development needs of their constituencies.

And of further concern is that employer needs are also left unmet.

But community organizations, community colleges, CareerLink, and employers all working together have proven to be very successful in providing economic advancement opportunities for underemployed and underplayed residents of marginalized communities.

It is important and vital to the social and economic health of marginalized communities and communities of color to create a line item in the state budget that supports community-based workforce development centers.

The Spanish American Civic Association has already taken proactive measures along this line by creating Tec Centro, a bilingual workforce development center in Lancaster. Our seven (7) year experience in operating Tec Centro in Lancaster has allowed us to create a platform for community colleges, technical schools, philanthropy, corporate sponsors, employers and the CareerLink to unite in addressing underemployment and unemployment issues in our community.

Our organization with the help of our corporate and philanthropic partners has invested \$7M in the establishment of two technology centers.

1. The Harrisburg Area Community Center has set up Allied Health courses in our neighborhood facility in the areas of Certified Nursing Assistant, Medical Assistant, and Physician Office Assistant.
2. Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology has brought its significant resources in trades programs are into our neighborhood and established trade occupational areas in HVAC Refrigeration and Maintenance, Industrial Electrical, Commercial Plumbing, and Facilities Maintenance offering a short-term certificate program.
3. Tec Centro also offers its own Dental Assistant and Culinary Arts Program.

Our future development will be in the areas of Lab Technician, Computer Software Engineering, Welding, and Metal Fabrication through our partnership with Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology. All careers of high demand in our community.

Our 7-year record has provided a powerful model for other communities seeking to address its workforce development needs to request our assistance in setting up Tec Centro operations in their community.

As a result, the community, government, business, and philanthropic leadership in Reading has replicated the Tec Centro model. Tec Centro Berks is currently developing its facility and services.

A similar effort is developing in York, with a planned opening of Tec Centro York in 2022.

Lebanon is one more region working in community business, and government partnerships to create Tec Centro Lebanon.

State agencies need to support the efforts that are in evidence in these communities and recognize the regional effort being made to deal with workforce development issues from the community level up rather than from government down.

The return on investment is impressive and has given our investors and stakeholders confidence that Tec Centro is a model that works.

Since opening in 2014, Tec Centro has placed 1459 individuals in permanent employment with most recent an average hourly wage of \$17.08.

Tec Centro graduates have generated \$27M funneling this back to the local economy since opening its doors. This results in an estimated investment of \$8.5M back into the local economy (assuming an average of \$10 an hour, full-time employment).

Adult learners participating in the Tec Centro program increase their wages by 40%. And wages at placement for learners graduating from Tec Centro range from \$15.00 to \$20.00 depending on the occupational area.

While these numbers are powerful, please allow me to share a testimonial with you that paints an even clearer picture of how these numbers and statistics equate to a real life that has been profoundly impacted.

Karina was originally from Honduras and moved to the US when she was a teenager. She was receiving assistance from the state to meet her basic needs. She did not have her GED/HS diploma which made it next to impossible for her to find good employment. The most Karina could earn at a job was \$9.10 per hour. In November 2019, she enrolled in Tec Centro's Dental Assistant program. During her externship she worked at American Dental for \$11.00 per hour and quickly moved up to a job at \$16.00 per hour. She is now working at Cleona Dental making \$20.00 per hour, more than doubling her earning rate in a short amount of time thanks to Tec Centro's subsidized workforce development services.

Karina plans to go back to school to further her education, buy a new home, and get married. This one story exemplifies the hundreds of lives changed by Tec Centro which help to produce an educated, employed, and thriving community. And this is only the beginning. Through Pennsylvania's investment in programs like these, there are so many more success stories to be told!

Thank you for the opportunity to present the strong evidence of success for community based make our case for community-based workforce development centers and to make recommendations for future funding and support which we hope you will seriously consider. I invite each one of you to visit SACA/Tec Centro where you will gain a vantage point into the progress and outcomes taking place every day in our facilities.

Again, thank you. Muchas Gracias