



Testimony

Submitted on behalf of the
Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry

Before the:
Senate Education Committee

Presented by:
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Chairwoman Culver, Chairwoman Williams, and Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on an issue that is critical to Pennsylvania's workforce and economic competitiveness: expanding access to qualified talent. My name is Aaron Riggleman, and I serve as Director of Government Affairs for the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry. The PA Chamber represents approximately 12,000 employers across every region and every industry. We work toward one mission: making Pennsylvania the most competitive state in the nation to do business.

Pennsylvania employers continue to face significant workforce challenges. Across industries, businesses need access to a larger pool of qualified workers, and the ability to attract, develop, and retain talent remains a key factor in their ability to grow and compete. Addressing these challenges requires us to examine how Pennsylvania prepares students for the workforce, connects education to employer needs, and creates pathways for more individuals to enter and succeed in meaningful careers.

Higher education plays a critical role in meeting these needs. Colleges and universities help prepare the next generation of workers, and employers depend on them to develop the technical knowledge and broader skills necessary for success. At the same time, the cost and time commitment associated with earning a degree can present barriers for students who are eager to enter the workforce or advance their careers.

We support efforts to make higher education more affordable and accessible, and we recognize the potential benefits of giving institutions greater flexibility to develop programs that meet the needs of students and employers. For some students and degree

programs, a more streamlined path to completion could reduce costs, help students enter the workforce sooner, and expand the pool of candidates available to Pennsylvania employers. These are worthwhile goals, particularly as businesses across the Commonwealth continue to compete for talent.

Achieving these goals requires a clear understanding of what employers need from graduates. Beyond technical knowledge, businesses increasingly value critical thinking, written and verbal communication, problem-solving, collaboration, sound judgment, and the ability to adapt to changing demands. Foundational coursework, particularly in the early years of college, helps students develop these skills and build the broader knowledge necessary for more advanced study and professional success. As institutions consider different approaches to degree requirements, it is important to ensure students continue to have the opportunity to develop these competencies alongside the specialized knowledge required for their chosen fields.

Pennsylvania's colleges and universities are already working to meet these expectations. Institutions are developing programs aligned with in-demand occupations, strengthening partnerships with businesses, and adapting curricula to ensure students graduate with relevant, practical skills. These efforts demonstrate that higher education and the business community share a common goal: preparing more Pennsylvanians to succeed in the workforce. As policymakers consider additional pathways, building on this work and engaging institutions and employers in the process will be important.

At the same time, educational requirements can vary considerably by discipline. Some programs may have opportunities to reconsider how coursework is structured or delivered, while others depend on foundational instruction, sequential learning, and specialized preparation. Institutions are best positioned to evaluate their programs in consultation with faculty, employers, and accreditors, with an understanding of the knowledge and competencies graduates must demonstrate.

As Pennsylvania looks for ways to increase the availability of graduates entering the workforce, we must also consider how proposed changes may affect the depth and breadth of their preparation. Reducing credit requirements raises an important question: how can institutions create more efficient pathways while ensuring students receive the preparation necessary to succeed? Employers need confidence that graduates of a three-year bachelor's degree program are as well prepared to enter the workforce and advance in their careers as graduates of a traditional four-year program. Maintaining that confidence will be essential to ensuring that efforts to expand the talent pipeline deliver lasting benefits.

We also encourage consideration of how degree designations communicate the education and preparation a graduate has received. Students invest significant time and resources in their education, and employers rely on credentials to understand qualifications and assess readiness for employment or further education. As institutions explore programs with substantially different credit requirements, clear learning outcomes and appropriate transparency can help ensure employers understand what graduates have learned and can do.

Ultimately, Pennsylvania needs to do both: increase the number of qualified individuals entering the workforce and ensure those individuals are prepared to succeed. Expanding educational access, reducing unnecessary barriers to completion, and helping students begin their careers sooner can all contribute to that goal. The opportunity is to explore new approaches that serve students and employers while maintaining the quality, credibility, and value of Pennsylvania's higher education system.

The PA Chamber appreciates the committee's attention to this issue and supports continued efforts to make higher education more accessible, strengthen the talent pipeline, and improve Pennsylvania's economic competitiveness. We look forward to continued collaboration among employers, higher education institutions, and policymakers to ensure these efforts deliver meaningful outcomes for students, businesses, and the Commonwealth.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome any questions.