

**Testimony of American Student Assistance
on H.3756, An Act to Increase Student Access to Career Technical Education Schools and Programs
Which Are Aligned with Regional Labor Market Needs, and S.302, An Act Calling for a Comprehensive
Study of Vocational Education in the Commonwealth**

American Student Assistance (ASA), a Massachusetts non-profit committed to helping kids know themselves, know their options, and make informed choices to achieve their education and career goals, would like to offer strong support of H.3756, *An Act to Increase Student Access to Career Technical Education Schools and Programs Which Are Aligned with Regional Labor Market Needs*, and S.302, *An Act Calling for a Comprehensive Study of Vocational Education in the Commonwealth*. These bills will help thousands more college students across the Commonwealth gain access to valuable career and technical education (CTE) programs that will set them on a course for success and create a pipeline of highly skilled, educated workers to propel our state economy.

It is critical that Massachusetts develop better defined college and career pathways for its youth. While our Commonwealth on the whole fared better than the nation during the recent Great Recession, our workforce is older than the national average. We do enjoy one of the most highly educated workforces in the United States, but the highest concentration of our most educated workers is among those 45 and older.ⁱ Further, many of the degrees that are being completed aren't well aligned with the state's projected areas of job growth: Although health services degrees are on the rise, degrees in science, math, engineering and computer science have declined in recent years.ⁱⁱ

H.3756

One way we can help students explore the wide variety of potential 21st-century jobs and gain critical hands-on learning opportunities is through career and technical education (CTE) at the middle and high school level. Although Massachusetts is world-renowned for its higher education, our local CTE offerings have been in fact radically transformed for the better over the past 20 years and elements of it have been called "the Cadillac model of the CTE world."ⁱⁱⁱ Recent research has shown secondary CTE schools in Massachusetts are producing positive student outcomes, with far lower dropout rates than the state average and some of the state's highest graduation rates.^{iv}

Despite its progress in recent years, though, CTE continues to lag behind the other parts of the Massachusetts education system in terms of priority and public perception. In fact, only one in five Massachusetts high school students is enrolled in a CTE program. On the one hand, this is due to low levels of awareness of the availability of viable CTE programs in some cities and towns, and a total lack of access in other areas, as one-third of the state's 351 communities are not served by CTE programming of any kind.^v But on the other hand, CTE in Massachusetts is in some respects a victim of its own success: approximately 3,200 students aren't enrolled in a CTE school because they're wait-listed, particularly in the state's "Gateway" cities. As funding and investment in CTE over the years has not kept pace with rising costs, the state's CTE schools and programs no longer have the capacity to meet the growing needs of Massachusetts students, both the ones already interested in CTE and the ones who could benefit from it if they only knew the opportunities available.

H.3756 would bring needed attention, funding and support to Massachusetts CTE and better align offerings with regional workforce demands. We believe this far-reaching legislation will go a long way toward giving CTE in our Commonwealth the care and attention it deserves.

S.302

Similarly, we also support a comprehensive study on CTE as proposed in S.302. While many of the solutions proposed in H.3756 will help strengthen CTE in Massachusetts, we recognize the complexity of the issue. We believe deeper knowledge of the inequities that persist in our vocational programs, including unequal access to adequate transportation and equipment, along with an understanding of projected costs to meet unmet demand, is crucial to improving CTE for all Massachusetts students in the future.

Massachusetts would clearly greatly benefit from a more robust pipeline of students who know their own skills and interests, better understand career options, and make better choices about designing an individual pathway that will allow them to fulfill their potential in a rewarding career and as a productive member of society. The Commonwealth's Career and Technical Education system can play a vital role in providing students with more pathways to achieve their dreams – and our state's labor force needs.

We urge you to vote H.3756 and S.302 out of committee.

ⁱ Commonwealth Corporation. (2013, April). Closing the Massachusetts Skills Gap: Recommendations and Action Steps. Retrieved from http://commcorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/resources_2013-04-closing-ma-skills-gap-recommendations-and-action-steps.pdf

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Branham, Mary. (2017, July/August). American Dream Case Studies: Massachusetts Program the 'Cadillac of CTE'. The Council of State Governments. Retrieved from http://www.csg.org/pubs/capitolideas/sep_oct_2011/MassRegional.aspx

^{iv} Achieve. (2015, June). Best of Both Worlds: How Massachusetts Vocational Schools Are Preparing Students for College and Careers. Retrieved from https://www.achieve.org/files/Achieve_MAcareerTech.pdf

^v Tumber, Catherine; Bluestone, Barry; Walsh, Don; Huessy, James; and Toukhy, Ali El. (2016, January). The Critical Importance of Vocational Education in the Commonwealth. Retrieved from <https://www.northeastern.edu/cssresearch/dukakiscenter/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2018/03/AVTE.NORTHEASTERN-REPORT-final.pdf>