

To: Rep. Marla Brown's Office

From: Leonard A. Rich, Superintendent, Laurel School District & Administrative Director,
Lawrence County CTC

Date: March 12, 2026

Subject: Written Testimony – Strengthening Workforce Development in the Skilled Trades

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the critical need to strengthen Pennsylvania's workforce development. My perspective is shaped by a unique dual-leadership role: serving as the Superintendent of the Laurel School District and the Administrative Director of the Lawrence County Career and Technical Center (LCCTC).

In Lawrence County, we do more than just teach trades; we create approximately 135 college and/or career ready citizens for Lawrence County each year. Our mission is to transform students into skilled professionals who drive the Commonwealth's growth.

The Lawrence County Labor Market & The Skilled Trades

Lawrence County's economic landscape is heavily defined by industries that demand high-level technical expertise. Our labor market is currently anchored by:

- **Manufacturing (13.1% of employment):** This sector remains a cornerstone of our local economy. LCCTC supports manufacturing by offering Machine Tool Technology, Electrical Occupations, and Welding.
- **Healthcare & Social Services (21.4%):** A dominant field requiring a constant influx of certified medical professionals. The LCCTC has a thriving Health Assistant program.
- **High-Priority Growth:** State data identifies **Industrial Machinery Mechanics, Welders, and Electricians** as top-priority occupations in our region, with projected growth rates exceeding 10–23% through 2030.

The "skills gap" is not a theory in Lawrence County; it is a daily reality for our local employers. Our role at LCCTC is to bridge that gap by aligning our 13 vocational programs directly with these high-demand sectors.

Industry-Recognized Credentials & Vocational Alignment

At LCCTC, we believe a high school diploma is a starting point, but an industry credential is a "license to work." We hold our students to national standards through **NOCTI** (National Occupational Competency Testing Institute) and **NIMS** (National Institute for Metalworking Skills). A sample of the numerous industry recognized credentials available at LCCTC include:

Career and Technical Program	Industry-Recognized Credential(s)
Machine Tool Technology	NIMS (Level 1 Machining), NOCTI
Welding	AWS (American Welding Society) SENSE, OSHA 10
Health Assistant	NATCEP (Nurse Aide), CPR/First Aid
Auto Technology	ASE (Automotive Service Excellence), PA Inspection
Construction Trades	NCCER (National Center for Construction Education & Research)
Cosmetology	PA State Board of Cosmetology License
Culinary Arts	ServSafe Food Protection Manager
Commercial Art	Adobe Certified Professional

Workforce Readiness: The Power of Cooperative Education

The most effective way to ensure workforce readiness is to place students in the workforce before they even graduate. Our **Cooperative Education (Co-Op)** program is the crown jewel of this effort.

Currently, approximately one-third of all LCCTC seniors are involved in Co-Op on either a part-time or full-time basis. These students have effectively begun their professional careers while still in high school, earning a family-sustaining wage and gaining seniority before they receive their diplomas.

The impact is twofold:

1. **For the Student:** They gain "real-world" accountability and technical mastery that cannot be replicated in a lab setting.
2. **For the Employer:** They gain a "try-before-you-hire" period with a student who is already vetted, trained, and certified by LCCTC.

Policy Recommendations

To ensure LCCTC can continue to serve as a primary talent pipeline without being diluted by adult education mandates (as we focus exclusively on secondary student success), I propose the following:

1. **Investment in Equipment Parity:** Funding must ensure that CTC equipment matches the "state-of-the-art" machinery currently used by Commonwealth manufacturers. Structural changes need addressed in the law specifically to the competitive equipment grants that create winners and losers in Pennsylvania.
2. **Expansion of Co-Op Incentives:** Provide tax credits or grants to small-and-medium-sized businesses that take on Co-Op students, offsetting the costs of mentorship.

3. **Streamlining Certification Costs:** The Commonwealth should consider direct subsidies for the testing fees associated with NIMS, AWS, and NATCEP to ensure no student is barred from a credential due to financial hardship.

Conclusion

Educators in Lawrence County need to create graduates who are not just that, but can address the needs of our local performers and be ready to seize the opportunity at new jobs that have not even been created yet. We are proud of the fact that our students leave us not just with a handshake and a diploma, but with a career path already in motion.

I look forward to discussing how we can scale the success of Lawrence County across the Commonwealth on March 19.