



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Kennedy's Bill to Prepare Workers for 21st Century Jobs Clears First Legislative Hurdle

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY February 12, 2013

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*Senator Kennedy's Center of Workforce Achievement proposal passes Senate Economic Development Committee.*

*'Skills gap' cited as force causing hundreds of local jobs to go unfilled. Kennedy's bill aims to bridge gap between skills demand and supply in local workforce.*

ALBANY, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, announced his legislation to establish Centers of Workforce Achievement cleared an important legislative hurdle today and earned

a stamp of approval from the Senate Economic Development Committee. Kennedy's bill – which was unanimously approved in committee – will help bridge the “skills gap” and prepare workers for jobs in our ever-evolving economy. The Centers of Workforce Achievement are designed to partner community colleges with local employers and regional economic experts to develop a skilled workforce for growth industries within the economies of each region of the state.

Kennedy first unveiled his legislation in August with Ford Motor Company officials at Erie Community College. Establishing a Center of Workforce Achievement at ECC would help address a persistent trend that has been observed in Western New York and across the nation – several businesses have job openings going unfilled every month because they can't find qualified candidates with the necessary skills. In addition, students who enter this new program would significantly boost the likelihood that a job is waiting for them upon graduation.

“Each month, hundreds of local jobs go unfilled, even though many Western New Yorkers are out looking for work every day. We need to better prepare our workforce and fully gear workers with the tools to fill 21st century jobs,” Kennedy said. “Our Centers of Workforce Achievement plan will bridge the gap between the skills available in our workforce and the skills needed by local industries. It aims to connect program graduates with high-wage jobs and grow businesses in need of highly-trained workers.

At the end of December, more than 3.6 million job openings were unfilled nationwide. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate stood at 7.8 percent – demonstrating a disconnect between available workers and open jobs.

“An economy can only be as strong as its workforce,” Kennedy added. “Now that our bill has made it through committee, we're a step closer to enacting an important economic reform

that will strengthen our workforce and lead to a stronger economy.”

With committee approval secured, the bill can now start moving toward the Senate floor to be voted on by the full chamber. Senator Kennedy also addressed the skills gap issue at today’s public hearing on the state budget's impact on economic development. Ken Adams, president and CEO of the Empire State Development Corporation, expressed interest in working with Senator Kennedy to enact reforms to re-tool the state's workforce.

Kennedy’s proposal will foster collaborative public-private partnerships between community colleges and top local employers to design necessary curriculum to ensure students can find local jobs when they graduate.

The Centers of Workforce Achievement initiative will advance the creation of these highly productive partnerships and ensure an even higher degree of collaboration between community colleges and private businesses. These Centers will foster an intense focus on the regional skills needs of existing businesses, and by training workers to fit these needs, they will help keep and create jobs in New York State.

The Centers of Workforce Achievement will function similar to SUNY Centers of Excellence in terms of legislative approval and oversight. This bill also establishes a funding stream to support the development of the Centers. Partnerships entered into by community colleges and private businesses will help ensure that students are fully prepared to find jobs upon graduation.

To read the legislation, visit: <http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/bill/S539-2013>.

Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes carries the bill in the Assembly.

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*Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the towns of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.*