



Workforce Professionals Training Institute – The Workforce Field Building Hub

Testimony to City Council by Justin Collins, Assistant Director of the Hub

March 18, 2019

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Justin Collins, and I represent the Workforce Field Building Hub at the Workforce Professionals Training Institute, or WPTI. The Hub serves as a convener of key stakeholders across the workforce development system in New York City and beyond to identify key challenges and develop solutions and best practices for the field. We appreciate the City Council's willingness to convene a hearing on the Mayor's *New York Works* plan, and on the progress the City has made with regard to that agenda. In reading the 2018 *New York Works* update, we were pleased to see the City has focused significant effort on redeveloping City-owned property to support job creation, as well as investing in growing industries to foster additional job growth across multiple sectors.

While we applaud the City's desire to create jobs through a variety of development projects and targeted investments, this is only one part of the strategy for addressing the workforce needs of disadvantaged New Yorkers. As was mentioned by the City in the 2018 *New York Works* update, too many of our fellow New Yorkers continue to struggle, with a rapidly changing job market squeezing out the city's middle class, and rapidly increasing rents. Beyond that, the city's most disadvantaged communities face even more dire challenges, struggling with unemployment and underemployment in a city in which a career, and resulting economic mobility, is increasingly out of reach. These challenging circumstances underscore the importance of a strong workforce development ecosystem, in addition to job creation and economic development, to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to the economic opportunities that have defined this city for more than a century.

It was in response to this pressing need for a strong workforce development ecosystem that the Hub released our *Workforce Agenda* report in September 2018, in which we outlined the key issues facing the workforce system and the key steps that should be taken to ensure that New Yorkers are prepared for, and have access to, the in-demand career pathways that can help them advance economically. We are happy to provide copies of the report at any point if the Council is interested.

While *New York Works* does address the issue of job creation, it does not yet address the issue of how workers are trained for and connected to these jobs. While the City has addressed some of this in its existing career pathways work, overseen by the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, the two strategies – job creation and workforce development – appear disconnected. Namely, the City needs to directly align its career pathways framework and initiatives with the job creation strategies outlined in *New York Works* and give this work the financial support it requires. Furthermore, the City needs not

only to significantly increase its investment in career pathways and workforce development, but better engage organizations and professionals in the workforce field when designing RFPs and developing programs in order to harness their expertise and build stronger programs.

Furthermore, the City can also support better data infrastructure in order to foster information sharing and analysis across organizations, facilitating data-driven and evidence-supported programming that is responsive to both jobseeker needs and labor market demands. While we have seen progress from the City with regard to the development of Common Metrics for workforce programming, this work does not yet include all City-administered workforce programs, and has not yet systematically informed the implementation of the work set forth as part of *New York Works*.

Lastly, we ask City to increase support for bridge programming, consistent with the Mayor's 2014 promise to provide \$60 million additional dollars annually for this work by 2020. Bridge programming brings many individuals with lower educational attainment up to the literacy and math levels necessary for them to enter sector-focused job training, embark on a career path, and develop the skills necessary to access the types of jobs highlighted in *New York Works* paying family sustaining wages of \$50,000 or more. The jobs being created through City development projects in industries prioritized in *New York Works* often require advanced skills; effective bridge programming closes the skill and educational gap, positions individuals to engage in and successfully complete training, and become competitive candidates for careers with opportunities for advancement.

To conclude, investment in job creation is only optimized when it is complemented by real investment in workforce development. We not only need new jobs here in New York City, but we need to prepare and connect New Yorkers to career pathways and growth opportunities if we want to make a real impact on economic inequality and foster economic and social mobility. And to do this, we need to ensure that the organizations providing these essential services are at the table when the City is shaping its workforce policy; that data are being harnessed to inform programming and direct resources; and that high-quality programs are receiving the funds they need to do the job.

For resources, please visit:

The Workforce Field Building Hub at the Workforce Professionals Training Institute:

<http://thehub.workforceprofessionals.org/>

The Workforce Agenda for New York City: https://thehub.workforceprofessionals.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Workforce-Agenda-for-NYC_Sept2018.pdf