



Rhode Island Office of the
Postsecondary Commissioner

Shannon W. Gilkey, EdD, Commissioner

February 17, 2022

Chairman Marvin L. Abney
House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02908

RE: ARPA proposal - Higher Education Matching Grant Program in Article 1 – Section 16

Dear Chairman Abney:

I am writing in enthusiastic support of the ARPA proposal in Article 1, Section 16 for the Higher Education Matching Grant Program, which would support the critical expansion of services at the Westerly and Woonsocket Education Centers. This funding will create a much-needed opportunity to partner with the State in leveraging additional funding to support the workforce development work at the Centers and in these communities.

The Westerly Education Center (WEC) is a workforce training and education center that delivers high-quality education to meet projected workforce growth. We have trained over 3,500 people in higher education or workforce programs in the past 5 years. We provide access to education locally and partner with nonprofits, higher education partners, and industry. Acting as an intermediary between higher education and workforce we host programs from CCRI, RIC, URI, and JWU.

The \$2.5 million request would support WEC's growth. We have some capital needs of the current building that include lighting, backup IT server, cameras, and the build-out and outfitting of a mezzanine, a space that will allow us to collocate with the Office of Veterans Affairs to provide additional services to community members. This funding would also allow us to build out a much-needed CNC lab and a CNA training space and testing site, expanding the CCRI program to the southern half of the state. We are additionally seeking space outside of our current footprint, and \$1M would be dedicated to the build-out and capital needs of Tower Street School in partnership with the Royce Family Fund which provided over \$4M in donated funds to start the Westerly Education Center.

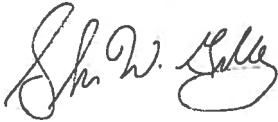
Modeled after the highly successful Westerly Education Center, the Woonsocket Education Center (WOC) will deliver high-quality education to meet projected workforce growth in the northeast region of the state. Located on historic Main Street in Woonsocket, the center will feature classrooms, computer laboratories, a customer service center, and customized space for hands-on, industry-ready training programs and will address access to higher education and improve the attainment of postsecondary degrees, certifications, and industry-recognized credentials.

The \$2.5 million request for WOC would support the building façade upgrades, a generator, and broadband connectivity to the building. Additionally, we hope to increase our footprint to include the 2nd floor of the facility and build additional classrooms, science labs to support process technology, and additional space to support adult education and workforce programming.

Thank you for your continued support of the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner and our Education Centers. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sh. W. Gilkey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Dr. Shannon Gilkey
Commissioner of Postsecondary Education