



Joint letter of concern regarding HB 297

House Education Committee Members,

On behalf of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA), Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators (PACTA), Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units (PAIU), Pennsylvania Principals Association, and Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA), thank you for your interest in ensuring every public school student is more aware of the educational opportunities available to them through their public career and technology center. This is a concept that all of our organizations support and would like to help you achieve.

However, as currently written, House Bill 297 (P.N. 270) would also extend to employers, which presents substantial difficulties for school leaders in implementing the provisions of the bill. Specifically, our significant concerns include:

- The following terms and phrases in the bill, which would be important to school leaders attempting to implement the bill, are undefined: “representatives of skilled trades”; “business, industry, charitable institutions and other employers”; “equal access”; and “delivery of information”.
  - This terminology would seem to open schools to any and all employers and interest groups in the school community while giving schools no flexibility or discretion in determining which employers are appropriate and/or useful to have access or provide information to students.
- School entities would be required to allow employers to recruit and deliver information regarding employment opportunities to students enrolled in the school entity and provide equal access to employment/placement services. The broad and vague language in the bill leaves school leaders unsure as to what this would obligate schools to do.
  - Would this require physical or electronic delivery to all students in every grade? Later in the bill access to students is limited to grades 4-12. Would this require schools to actively distribute information to each student or simply make the information available? Would this require schools to allow employers to deliver that information directly to students? How would this provision impact current school internship and cooperative educational opportunities? Does this provision create the potential for liability if a school cannot accommodate every employer and in the manner wanted by the employer?
- Schools would be required to provide employers with equal access to their guidance services. The broad and vague language in the bill leaves school leaders unsure as to what this would obligate schools to do.
  - Would this require schools to allow employers to meet with school guidance counselors? Would guidance counselors be required to pass information regarding all employment opportunities along to students?

- Schools would be required to provide all employers at least one opportunity to speak directly to students in grades 4-12 during the school year to provide age-appropriate information regarding career opportunities.
  - Would schools be required to allow employers who request to speak with students to do so at any time during the school year? Would these opportunities need to take place during the school day? If a school entity has a career fair at a high school, would that qualify as an opportunity and would the entity be required to transport middle and elementary students to the career fair to ensure they have an opportunity to participate? If that career fair were to fill up with employers, would schools be required to hold additional fairs?
- Schools would be required to distribute information from the Departments of Education and Labor and Industry to all students in grades 4-12 on regional workforce needs, career cluster occupations, high-priority occupations, and training opportunities.
  - Would schools be required to physically distribute this material? Why would this requirement extend to students in elementary grades when they are several years away from considering specific career opportunities?

### Impacts

The bill would open schools to all employers and interest groups in the school community including fast food restaurants, partisan political organizations, bars, casinos, and religious groups. With no ability to screen employers for appropriateness and usefulness, public schools would become a hub for employers to fill seasonal, temporary and other non-career positions. With schools worried about keeping staff and student safe, opening schools up to all employers in the area creates another layer of safety concern.

Depending on its interpretation, and due to its broad and vague language, this bill has the potential to result in significant intrusions into instructional time and increased costs for schools. Allowing employers to speak directly to students during the school day would reduce valuable instruction time and force schools to incur transportation costs so all students in grades 4-12 could participate. The new mandate would also add to the workload of school staff who have to respond to inquiries from employers and/or supervise the interaction between students and employers.

Schools are already required to ensure career exploration is taking place as early as elementary school. Under Pennsylvania's Consolidated plan for implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), students must demonstrate engagement in career exploration and preparation by the end of grade 5 and create an individualized career plan and participate in career preparation activities by the end of grade 8. Such career exploration is required to be aligned with the state's Career Education and Work academic standards which ensure students understand career options in relationship to individual interests, aptitudes and skills.

Guidance counselors in most schools are already overextended in ensuring their assigned students are doing well academically and socially. If guidance counselors are inundated with access requests from every interested employer, which they would be mandated to work with, it would inhibit their ability to perform their primary job functions.

Granting equal access to school employment and placement services could interfere with current school internship and cooperative educational opportunities. Employers participating in those programs have been vetted and provide appropriate and useful educational work opportunities for students. If schools were required to open those programs up to all employers, schools would lose the ability to ensure that those opportunities provide valuable experiences.

#### Conclusion

In its current form, our organizations would have to oppose HB 297. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you on this bill to get to a position of support. Please contact us if you would like to discuss these issues further.

Thank you,

Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA)  
Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators (PACTA)  
Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units (PAIU)  
Pennsylvania Principals Association  
Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA)