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Testimony of Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce President & CEO James E. Rooney to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means and House Committee on Federal Stimulus and Census Oversight

Senator Lewis, Chairman Hunt, members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, and members of the House Committee on Federal Stimulus and Census Oversight, thank you for inviting the Massachusetts Business Coalition on Skills to participate in today's hearing. My name is Jim Rooney, and I am the President and CEO of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

The Massachusetts Business Coalition on Skills is a diverse coalition of 28 business groups from across the state that formed to originate and advocate for statewide policy proposals to promote equitable skills development and attainment in the talent pipeline, in the current workforce, and for the jobs of the future.

I am here today to highlight three ways we think the state should use ARPA funding to equitably close current and future skills gap.

Data Collection

First, we believe any workforce development programs and grants should require participant-level data collection on outcomes, including skills or credentials attained and employment. Further, this data needs to include a breakdown by race, and the state should aggregate the data for public release.

Governor Baker's recent Future of Work report estimates the state will need to retrain 30,000 to 40,000 workers annually over the next decade to not impede economic growth. As we prepare for shifting skill requirements coming out of the pandemic and into the future, we must actively counter the potential for rising inequality in skills attainment. Massachusetts cannot accomplish that without data collection.

Essential Skills

The state should also use ARPA funding for workforce development programs targeting skills gaps that we know exist today, namely essential skills training and career/vocational technical education (CVTE).

Essential skills – or soft skills – are in high demand among employers, and the demand is projected to increase in the years to come. These are foundational and transferable skills that put learners on a path toward career success.

Career/Vocational Technical Education (CVTE)

On CVTE, we must eliminate the Chapter 74 waitlists that drive ongoing capacity constraints. A DESE survey from earlier this year found there are almost 2 applicants for every available CVTE seat, and that waitlists disproportionately impact students of color, English language learners, the economically-disadvantaged, and students with disabilities because they receive fewer offers of admission to the limited supply of CVTE seats compared to admission offers to their peers

I am joined by two of my colleagues from the Coalition that can elaborate more on the issues I have outlined. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.