U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Statement on Reauthorizing the
Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act

The purpose of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act) is to improve the academic, career, and technical skills of students at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. While the Perkins Act provides a relatively small proportion of funding for career and technical education (CTE) nationwide, it plays a prominent role in driving state and local policies.

For this reason, it is critical that the Perkins Act promote quality and innovation in CTE programs in order to meet the needs of both students and employers. For students, this means providing a true pathway toward a high-skilled, high-paying job and/or a postsecondary degree or certificate. For employers, this means providing a workforce that is ready and able to meet the growing skill demands to be competitive. To accomplish these goals, Perkins funding must serve as a catalyst for business engagement and career pathways and leverage the integration of other funding sources.

The most recent reauthorization of the Perkins Act in 2006 sought to address several major criticisms of the program identified in national evaluations. These included issues related to a lack of coordination and employer input, insufficient accountability, and limited focus on combining academic and technical courses. While the 2006 authorization took important steps in each of these areas, there is broad recognition that more needs to be done to strengthen and expand high-quality CTE programs. The upcoming reauthorization of the Perkins Act provides the opportunity to accomplish these critical goals:

1. **Strengthen Business Engagement –** The Perkins Act includes provisions promoting the involvement of the business community. However, there is a lack of emphasis on this essential element, which is crucial for ensuring programs are relevant to the skills demanded in the workplace. Simply put, CTE programs based on yesterday's skill needs will fail students and employers alike. Current provisions must be strengthened to ensure real and meaningful collaboration with business groups such as local chambers of commerce in the identification, design, and implementation of CTE courses and programs. Options to consider should include measureable evidence of meaningful business engagement as part of local grant applications, which could include "sign-off" of state and local plans; business oversight of the extent to which programs demonstrate on-going collaboration with employers; and new approaches to funding CTE programs, such as matching grants as part of joint projects. In addition, business engagement should carry through to accountability where employers assess program effectiveness, outcomes, and success based on quality data.

2. **Improve Secondary and Postsecondary Linkages and Expand Early College Opportunities –** There are many examples of high schools and community colleges working together to promote smooth transitions from secondary to postsecondary programs. Many of these examples reflect policies promoted in the last reauthorization

of the Perkins Act related to programs of study and articulation agreements. However, despite these efforts, too often there is little or no true integration of curriculum and courses between secondary and postsecondary institutions. This should be a hard and fast requirement for all grant recipients, to demonstrate through more explicit evidence that such linkages are in place prior to funds being awarded. Other options should also be explored, such as proposals to enable states to establish a competitive process (with at least a portion of current State Grant funds) limited to partnerships between secondary and postsecondary institutions, along with significant employer input, to fund truly integrated CTE programs. An explicit requirement would include providing a justification in any case where funds are NOT being used at the secondary level toward integrated "early college" programs such as dual credit, Advanced Placement, or articulated credit.

3. **Promote Innovation –** It is critical that CTE programs reflect and adapt to the realities of an ever-changing economy driven by innovation. A "cutting edge" program today will likely be out of date in a matter of years. Whether through competitive funding, increased flexibility or other incentives, CTE must build upon some of today's most promising initiatives. For example, CTE must take advantage of the growing power of massive open online courses (also known as MOOCS) and other distance education models; expanded types of providers, including public, private, and for-profit entities; new and expanded competency-based education programs to help improve completion and accelerate the time to degree; initiatives that drive funds through a "pay-for-performance" model; programs that leverage "out-of-school" time; and programs where students receive both their high school diploma and a free associates degree through a cohesive six-year program that combines high school, college, and career training along with significant business participation [e.g., P-TECH].

   At least some of these initiatives could be driven through expanded state flexibility in how funds are awarded locally in order to meet local, regional, or state economic development needs. In exchange for this flexibility, states should be able to demonstrate genuine collaboration among broader stakeholder groups such as state departments of commerce, business development agencies, and workforce boards. These are just a few of the examples which Perkins funds must promote to enable high schools and community colleges to deepen the success and impact of CTE programs throughout the nation.

4. **Demand an Accountable and Data-Driven System –** The current accountability system under the Perkins Act is greatly undermined by several factors. First, despite decades of effort, there continues to be a lack of consistency in how key terms are defined by states. For example, states have different ways of determining when a student is counted as participating in a CTE program – a fact that often makes state-to-state comparisons meaningless. Furthermore, the process by which states and local grantees negotiate their outcome levels often results in few if any programs being identified for poor performance. Questions also persist as to the reliability and validity of the data collected for accountability purposes.

The next reauthorization of the Perkins Act must take a close look at what is measured, how it is measured, how the results are used to improve programs, and ultimately how this information has utility for individual students. These discussions should also be within the context of other federal programs, including the Workforce Investment Act, the Higher Education Act, and the Adult Education Act – each with their own set of criteria, definitions, and reporting requirements that often overlap, resulting in far more dollars going into process rather than programs providing skills and services to students.

5. **Expand Emphasis on Integrated Academics –** CTE programs have been increasingly successful at exposing students to both technical as well as rigorous academic courses. According to the most recent data, from 1982 to 2004, the percentage of CTE students taking Algebra III, precalculus, or calculus courses went from 12% to nearly 40%. For biology and advanced science courses, the increase has been similarly dramatic whereas by 2004, 91% of CTE students completed such courses as compared to roughly 60% in 1982. Despite these impressive gains, much more should be done to not only expose CTE students to rigorous academic courses, but to integrate academic courses with career content as a means of expanding the relevancy of these subjects, particularly in the STEM fields, for all students.

6. **Prioritize Work-Based Learning and Academic/Career Guidance –** Embedding work-place learning opportunities is among the most critical elements of a successful CTE program. A priority must be placed on ensuring grantees provide these opportunities, either directly or through intermediary organizations able to manage and facilitate connecting students with employers.

   In addition, students should be provided with professional planning supports that enable them to develop and continuously improve upon a personalized academic and career plan that links their in-school and out-of-school education-related activities towards aspirational goals, including transitions to careers. Work-based learning through externships or other activities should also be made available to educators seeking to enhance their skills and training.

7. **Empower Students with Meaningful Credentials –** All CTE programs must provide students the ability to obtain a marketable credential that accurately reflects their skills and abilities as well as expands upon their career and academic opportunities. Employers are increasingly looking to alternative credentialing strategies that more closely align to quality standards defined by employers, validated by expert organizations and recognized broadly throughout their industry. These credentials—whether through national, portable industry certifications or through employer-engaged badging efforts—communicate clearly to employers what skills and proficiencies a student verifiably has. Not to be seen as a substitute for academic degrees, stackable credentialing enhances the educational process, builds trust with employers and significantly increases the competitiveness of students. To the best extent possible, CTE programs should align with and integrate industry-validated stackable credentials.