



OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

For Immediate Release:
March 22, 2021

CONTACT: Hazel Brewster
802-636-7047

*****PRESS RELEASE*****

Lt. Governor Molly Gray Hosts “Seat at the Table” on Workforce Development

Montpelier, Vt. — This afternoon, Lt. Governor Gray hosted her fourth “Seat at the Table” on the topic of workforce development. The session highlighted some of the successful workforce and career development initiatives underway as well as opportunities to make strategic investments as businesses and communities recover from COVID-19. Panelists spoke to their efforts and some of the lessons learned from this pandemic. 70 community leaders and policymakers joined the “Seat at the Table.”

“As we recover from this pandemic, workforce development must be a top priority. Our employers are struggling to recruit and retain employees across sectors. Our communities, economy and tax-base depend on our next generation accessing the good paying jobs that exist in Vermont right now,” Gray said, “Today’s panelists represent just some of the opportunities before us for partnership and strategic investment. I look forward to working with these leaders and many more across the state to train the next generation and reverse our demographic crisis.”

Speakers included Carolyn Weir, Executive Director of the J. Warren & Louis McClure Foundation; Joyce Judy, President of Community College of Vermont; Eileen Illuzzi, Director of North Country Career Center; Ken Cadow, Director of Career and Workforce Pathways at Randolph Union High School and Adam Grinold, Executive Director of Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation. Lt. Governor Gray moderated the event.

Panelists stressed the importance of addressing workforce development in Vermont as a system rather than in silos, noting that current policy and funding streams pit high school career programs against career and technical centers. Furthermore, panelists emphasized the need for adult students to be able to return to school and earn while learning. Panelists agreed that public-private partnerships and access to affordable, if not free, community college, should be supported as programs yielding a high return-on-investment when it comes to workforce development.

Eileen Illuzi of North Country Career Center discussed the work of Vermont's 17 regional career and technical centers, to promote localized career opportunities based on current needs and "applied academics." Eileen emphasized that, “gone are the days of college or career” and that students today must be encouraged to seek both college and career and be valued for entering any

number of the good paying jobs that exist in our communities. From hiring a plumber to picking up a prescription, Eileen noted that throughout this pandemic she has run into former students in all aspects of “everyday life.”

Carolyn Weir, of the McClure Foundation, said: “The McClure Foundation was thrilled to join Lieutenant Governor Gray and panelists to discuss workforce development and career pathways – topics that have been at the forefront of Vermonters’ minds this past year as high schoolers graduated into an environment of uncertainty and as the pandemic continues to take a toll on work.” She continued on to say, “Drawing on what philanthropy learned this past year about connecting Vermonters to careers in a time of crisis, we encourage Vermont to continue inspiring hope about the range of promising jobs projected for the state and the affordability of the education and training that leads to them.

Ken of Career and Workforce Pathways at Randolph Union High School discussed the sustained “deployed classroom model” which aims to engage 9th and 10th grade students in work-based learning through frequent field trips to innovate employers such as GW Plastics, Inc. in Bethel. Ken stressed the importance of schools working to understand the evolving needs of students and connecting academics with real-world applications.

Adam Grinold spoke on the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation’s Pipelines & Pathways Program (P3): “People need opportunity and employers need people. The ultimate goal of P3 is integrated career awareness and career skills-building throughout high school, implemented through experiences in and out of the classroom. Despite well-paid job openings in the region, many with on-the-job training and educational benefits, lack of awareness and preparedness is keeping young people under-employed.”

Joyce Judy, President of Community College Vermont, shared: “VT enjoys one of nation’s highest high school graduation rates but has one of lowest college-going rates of any state in the country... [CCV] offered free classes to Vermonters whose work or household situation was affected by COVID-19. This \$2.3 million program was proposed by the Vermont legislature and supported by the Governor. The funds came from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund. When we removed the almost \$1,000 price tag for a course, more than 500 adult Vermonters enrolled in courses that were aligned with high-demand careers such as early childhood education, healthcare, business, and manufacturing.”

A recording of the event is available to view on YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/fgBAxycyHQCA>

Vermonters wishing to attend future sessions, can register, and find additional information here: <https://ltgov.vermont.gov/seatatthetable>

###