



CONNECTICUT SOCIAL EQUITY COUNCIL

The 2025 Council Market Outlook Working Group

Cannabis Marketplace Non-Cannabis Subcommittee - First Working Session

Tuesday, November 5, 2025, at 12:00 pm via Zoom

Marketplace Non-Cannabis Chair:

Chris DiPentima (Non-Cannabis) **Connecticut Business Industry Association**

Subcommittee Members in Attendance:

Chris DiPentima President & CEO (CBIA)

Ben Dubow – Executive Director (Forge City Works)

Jason Chandersingh – Special Projects Coordinator (City of Bridgeport)

Hannah Granfield-Horton – Vice President of Workforce Initiatives (The Open Hearth)

NOTES:

The goal is not to re-create the wheel, but rather to scale on success stories that currently exist within our Disproportionately Impacted Areas (DIAs). Workforce development generally starts with industry need, reversing it to a neighborhood centered approach creates community pathways and helps individuals gain credentials. Additionally, 12 week burst programs are useful, however long-term wrap-around support will support true professional development. Given CT hasn't had huge population growth, focusing on communities and individuals is an innovative way to address employer needs.

In areas such as Bridgeport, there's been a large uptick in people starting their own businesses, especially since COVID-19. Service based businesses are most of the startups in Bridgeport, and this could be mirrored in other municipalities. Certain internship programs are in development in Bridgeport, which will connect high school students with local businesses, to give them practical work experience.

Additionally, reentry populations are struggling to get opportunities in general because of background checks, despite them being loyal and available employees. Local programs for reentry populations help, and entrepreneurship and micro-grants could prove to be very helpful in starting up economic opportunities for reentry and DIA populations broadly.

Qualifying for financing is a barrier to entry for entrepreneurship for all communities. Business owners have lapsed LLCs or lack financial knowledge to qualify for loans preventing them from taking advantage of opportunities.

We need to define target audiences and learn their specific needs. Not everyone knows what a Workforce Development Program is, some community members are skeptical of organizations coming in with promises of help. We need to identify the gaps in a community, look at best practices locally and statewide, and test initiatives to find a solution.

