

HOUSE BILL 745

By Haston

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 11; Title 49, Chapter 6 and Title 49, Chapter 7, relative to the Tennessee Work Ready Opportunity Program.

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has created public health and economic crises in the United States and in the State of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, it is imperative that Tennesseans be armed with the skills necessary to survive and compete in a post-pandemic workforce; and

WHEREAS, Site Selection Magazine cites ACT WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) as the way for working-age adults in rural areas to demonstrate their personal career aptitude and their community's readiness for corporate investment; and

WHEREAS, the State recognizes that many employers require the NCRC as a condition of employment; and

WHEREAS, the opportunity to pursue the industry-recognized, nationally portable NCRC will allow Tennesseans access to the jobs necessary for their recovery from the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, in the spirit of the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010, the NCRC aligns with the State's vision to increase the number of Tennesseans that earn a postsecondary credential, in order to remain economically competitive nationally and globally; and

WHEREAS, the ability to attract business and industry into the State and its municipalities will aid the State in its recovery from the crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by allowing the State to achieve a statewide Work-Ready Community designation; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-6-6001(b), is amended by deleting subdivision (3) and substituting:

(3) LEAs and public charter schools shall provide each student participating in an assessment pursuant to subdivision (b)(1) the opportunity to:

(A) Subject to appropriation, retake the assessment one (1) additional time prior to graduation; and

(B) Take the ACT WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) examinations through the Tennessee work ready opportunity program established in § 49-11-112, as a strategy for providing students more choice in choosing a career pathway.

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 11, Part 1, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

**49-11-112.**

(a) The department of labor and workforce development, in coordination with the department of education, shall develop and administer the Tennessee work ready opportunity program (T-WROP) to assess and certify adult displaced workers' and students' career readiness using nationally recognized assessments. The program must include assessments that:

(1) Are a standardized, criterion-referenced measure of broadly relevant foundational workplace skills;

(2) Assess and document readiness for a wide range of jobs;

(3) Measure skills in a wide range of areas, including:

(A) Applied mathematics;

(B) Workplace documents; and

(C) Graphic literacy;

(4) Align with research-based skill requirement profiles for specific industries and occupations;

(5) Lead to nationally recognized work-readiness certificates or credentials for participants who meet the minimum proficiency requirements on the component assessments;

(6) Be available in paper and computer-based formats;

(7) Provide data that can be used as a metric for the work-ready community initiative to document the skills of the emerging, transitioning, and incumbent labor market at county level; and

(8) Be aligned to a self-paced, modular skills curriculum to allow for skill remediation.

(b) The T-WROP must be available to:

(1) Adult displaced workers; and

(2) High school students in accordance with § 49-6-6001.

(c)

(1) Subject to appropriation, the commissioner of labor and workforce development shall allocate funding to:

(A) Administer the T-WROP;

(B) Provide job-profiling training and services to employers; and

(C) Conduct a virtual training program for communities on participation in the T-WROP.

(2) Subject to appropriation, the department of education shall allocate funding for high school students to take assessments through the T-WROP, as authorized in § 49-6-6001(b)(3)(B).

(d)

(1) The department of labor and workforce development and the department of education shall work in collaboration with the state workforce development board to track the number of high school students and the number of adult displaced workers who earn a national career readiness certificate through T-WROP.

(2) By January 1, 2026, the commissioners of labor and workforce development and education shall submit a report detailing the impacts of the T-WROP to the education committee of the senate, the education administration committee of the house of representatives, the commerce and labor committee of the senate, and the commerce committee of the house of representatives. The report must include:

(A) The total number of high school seniors who have earned a national career readiness certificate through the T-WROP, disaggregated by county of residence, race, gender, and the year in which the certificate was earned;

(B) The total number of adult displaced workers who have earned a national career readiness certificate through the T-WROP;

(C) The annual adult unemployment rate by county from the fiscal year ending in 2021 through the fiscal year ending in 2025; and

(D) Data regarding the state's return on investment for the T-WROP.

(e) As used in this section "adult displaced worker" means an eligible claimant of state unemployment insurance in accordance with rules promulgated by the department of labor and workforce development.

SECTION 3. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-7-202(r), is amended by adding the following as a new subdivision:

(6) The commission shall require each public institution of higher education to develop course credit articulation and academic program admission policies for individuals who successfully earn a national career readiness certificate. Public institutions of higher education shall publicize the opportunities to public high schools, adult education programs, and local workforce boards.

SECTION 4. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-7-1203, is amended by inserting the following language as a new subdivision (4) and redesignating the existing subdivision (4) and subsequent subdivisions accordingly:

(4) Developing opportunities for students to participate in the Tennessee work ready opportunity program, created in § 49-11-112.

SECTION 5. The department of labor and workforce development, in collaboration with the state board of education, is authorized to promulgate rules to effectuate the purposes of this act. The rules must be promulgated in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in title 4, chapter 5.

SECTION 6. This act is not an appropriation of funds, and funds shall not be obligated or expended pursuant to this act unless the funds are specifically appropriated by the general appropriations act.

SECTION 7. This act takes effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.