

**Testimony of Kelsey Schaberg, Senior Research Associate, MDRC  
Before the Connecticut General Assembly's Higher Education and Employment  
Advancement Committee**

**Re: House Bill 5478, An Act Supporting Learn and Earn Internship Opportunities**

**March 10, 2026**

Representative Haddad, Senator Slap, Representative Bronko, Senator Martin, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, my name is Kelsey Schaberg, and I am a Senior Research Associate at MDRC.

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization. Our researchers are dedicated to finding what works to improve the lives of low-income people. We evaluate existing programs and help develop and test new programs that are informed by research.

Yesterday, I gave a presentation to the New England Board of Higher Education on what we have learned about how to improve the employability outcomes of students following postsecondary education, and Chair Haddad invited me to testify at this hearing today. I am happy to be here to share the results of MDRC's research on career readiness and work experience programs.

There are three points that I want to emphasize from our research:

1. There is promising evidence that work experience programs, including paid internships ([report forthcoming](#)), are associated with positive employment and earnings outcomes for students post-graduation
2. [Many students face barriers](#) to accessing and participating in work experience programs
3. The design of work experience programs can influence both students' participation in these programs and their outcomes — important design factors include compensation and flexible schedules ([report forthcoming](#))

The existing evidence on work experience programs focuses primarily on paid internships and apprenticeships. Paid internships have been shown to be associated with higher starting salaries and more job offers for students post-graduation. These same associations are not seen for unpaid internships ([report forthcoming](#)). Apprenticeships have been shown to be [associated](#) with improved employment rates, but their association with earnings is not as strong.

We also know that more than just offering work experience programs, the design of these programs is crucial to students being able to access them and to their longer-term success. Paid



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programs, including internships, can help students who face financial barriers [be able to participate](#). Small stipends, however, are often not enough if they do not cover all a students' living expenses or [offset lost wages](#) they may have from reduced work. Flexible programs that are offered on campus, or in hybrid or virtual designs, can help remove transportation and scheduling barriers that students face ([report forthcoming](#)).

Mentoring, supervision, and clear learning objectives while in the program are also important to help students build confidence and overcome self-doubt they may face in a work environment. Finally, strong, ongoing [employer partnerships](#) are also key to increasing the number of opportunities, as well as the quality and relevance of the opportunities ([report forthcoming](#)).

In summary, pairing postsecondary education programs with quality, structured, well-supported work experience and career coaching programs can help enhance the employability outcomes of students. It is also crucial to not just implement these strategies but also [monitor and evaluate](#) their outcomes to ensure they are really helping promote students' success and employment.

I appreciate the opportunity to share our research with you. Thank you for your time.