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To: Chairwoman Lampitt, Vice-Chairwoman Jasey & Members of the Assembly
Education Committee

From: Althea D. Ford, NJBIA Vice President of Government Affairs
(aford@njbia.org)

Date: March 16, 2023

RE: NJBIA Testimony **Opposing Legislation to Eliminate High School
Testing - A-4639 (Caputo, Jasey, McKnight)**

Good morning! I am Althea D. Ford, Vice President of Government Affairs covering education for the New Jersey Business & Industry Association (NJBIA). Thank you, Chairwoman Lampitt and the members of the Assembly Education Committee, for considering our perspective on A-4639, and on behalf of our business community, NJBIA respectfully opposes this bill that will reduce data, accountability and standards within our education system.

We thank the Committee for receiving our previous testimony at its February 9, 2023 meeting, where this bill was considered for discussion only.

New Jersey has demonstrated investment in its K-12 education system, which is evidenced by its public schools consistently ranking among the highest in the nation. From a business community's perspective, the high performance of our schools contributes immensely to our workforce development pipeline and aids in attracting prospective businesses and employees to our state.

To accompany this investment and demonstrated quality, it is entirely appropriate and necessary for good education policy to promote data transparency, accountability, and higher standards within our successful education system. Our high school graduation test is an important component of that accountability and those standards.

We acknowledge the sponsor's concerns as noted in the February 9, 2023 committee meeting regarding the educational impact the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on students and teachers and recognize the State's previous enactment of legislation to suspend the use of any examination as a prerequisite for graduation for the class of 2023. While legitimate discussion has occurred and continues to occur regarding the logistics of assessments – how they are implemented, scoring, etc. – we should not lose sight of the importance of utilizing assessments in order to collect valuable data, increase accountability and maintain the high standards becoming of our educational institution.

Need for Data & Accountability:

Our schools in the aggregate are excellent, but that does not mean that each and every school and/or population subgroup is achieving at equally high levels. State testing allows school districts to better diagnose and target any deficiencies in educating its students and provides valuable information about the school's effectiveness in educating specific school population subgroups, such as limited-English students, students of color, special education students and/or low-income students. Additionally, it allows parents and school communities to hold schools accountable for such. This data is even more critical after the COVID-19 learning loss, as we need to assess the impact that the pandemic had on our schools and children. Any weakening of our testing policy could weaken the accountability and quality within our K-12 education system.

Need for High Standards in Midst of Workforce Crisis:

High standards matter and, in the midst of a major workforce crisis, NJBIA would argue that high standards defining that a New Jersey high school degree means something is even more important. Employers want to know that a student has a certain adequate level of skills, and the high school graduation test helps demonstrate that.

The current system and its tests set a statewide minimum standard for all schools while still allowing the portfolio option for some students to demonstrate proficiency. Any weakening of our high school testing policy could lead to lower standards for what it means to graduate high school. That could ultimately diminish our workforce quality, which is currently one of the strengths of our business climate in New Jersey.

While high school graduation tests do not automatically mean better accountability and higher standards, they are a part of the solution in schools and have been part of what makes New Jersey schools successful for a long time. NJBIA asks you to carefully reconsider any attempt to weaken our system of testing in our schools, and to focus on reforms that will lift students that have been left behind and need support to become career and college ready. NJBIA thanks you all for the consideration of our perspective on this bill. Please free to email me at aford@njbias.org if you have any questions about our position on this or any piece of legislation.