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**Comments of William J. Tinti
“Listening Session”
Congressman John F. Tierney and Assistant Secretary Jane Oates
Merrimack College, August 25, 2009**

Good morning President Champagne, Congressman Tierney and Secretary Oates and thank you for the opportunity to be here this morning on the campus of this great institution, Merrimack College. As you can see by the turnout from across Massachusetts, the topic of discussion—putting our neighbors back to work and training adults and young people for jobs in the 21st century economy is an important topic.

We are more than thrilled that Congressman Tierney, my congressman and friend, is leading efforts in the House of Representatives on behalf of Chairman Miller to reauthorize and *modernize* the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. We are equally thrilled that President Obama and Secretary Solis have chosen a leader for the Employment and Training Administration that is not only talented but has been the chief architect on behalf of Senator Kennedy of WIA and a person who both knows and understands Massachusetts well. Welcome back Jane.

I am here this morning both as a business leader and chair of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board; and also to represent the 16 workforce boards in Massachusetts as chair of our state association. We are all acutely aware of the challenges faced by the current recession and mindful of the

responsibilities as WIB members to work even harder to respond to the needs of unemployed and dislocated workers; and our youth. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act has been a key resource this summer to put thousands of teens to work---from the North Shore to the Berkshires, and as you know more than 10,000 kids are working in the state. But we have more to do and with your help a new WIA—one for the new century is long overdue. I would like to offer a few remarks on what we believe are key elements of new legislation.

First, in my opinion WIA has been successful because local private sector boards have driven a complex system—way too complex---at the local level. Our belief is that we need to streamline this system so that boards have the tools and resources to make decisions that have the greatest return for the customers we serve. WIA reauthorization must continue to support a **locally driven workforce system** that strengthens effective partnerships among business, labor, educators and community and faith-based organizations to deliver effective workforce services. To modernize this governance system we believe a smaller and more strategically focused board is necessary with more authority and more accountability for ensuring quality workforce services for job seekers – both youth and adults – and companies. This is difficult and challenging work in the best of economies and local partnerships and collaborations, such as that envisioned in WIA through a WIB-led system of strong One Stop Career Centers is the only way that we can build and sustain a quality workforce system. Where Chief Elected Officials have empowered the WIB to develop and implement a strategic vision for the region, like on the North Shore and in other regions of the state we have seen those areas succeed, and business, labor and education leaders engaged in the work of the board.

Second, new legislation must distill the key elements of the original law into a *simplified* training system for adult and English language learners, unemployed and dislocated workers and youth. As things stand now, local boards have little flexibility in the design and implementation of education and training

strategies to respond to the labor market needs of their region. **WIA today is constrained by the number of silos, as defined by each title of the Act, rather than a comprehensive unified strategy to address the needs of America's workforce.** The One-Stop Career Centers, first initiated as part of the national demonstration grant in 1996, and brought to scale in 2000 under WIA, have been the centerpiece of the workforce system in Massachusetts and across the nation. Serving hundreds of thousands of customers, in every economic environment, has been challenging with a declining federal commitment. These reduced resources have forced local areas to make a choice between the universal access infrastructure and training—with training often receiving the short end. We need the labor exchange infrastructure to serve jobseekers and employers, and adequate training resources to train workers for careers in emerging industry sectors. ARRA got it right in reorienting the system toward flexible training resources to support worker skill upgrades through our system of community colleges and vocational technical schools. Training for both unemployed and incumbent workers must be part of a renewed commitment to responding to the dual challenges of the skill shortage and labor surplus problems we are facing in the current economy.

Third, in Massachusetts we are fortunate to have the most consistent and forceful voices for young people in America at Northeastern's Center for Labor Market Studies in Andy Sum and Paul Harington and their team. Again ARRA got it right in reinstating the summer jobs program, but we need a comprehensive year round youth employment, training and education pathways program for in school and out-of-school youth with expanded and flexible eligibility and determination. As Secretary Oates has been heard to say, "How many times does someone need to prove they are poor?" month Mary Sarris testified at the HELP Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety hearing, drawing from CLMS research, we need nothing less than a *Teen Employment Marshall Plan* to respond to the crisis of young people. On the

North Shore we were able to put to work only 412 of the 1900 youth who sought jobs this summer. Two of the young people sum up their experience:

Taidge Mathieu, a current FIRSTJobs intern at the Gloucester Stage Company said "This job prepares me for what I'll hopefully be doing in the future. It gives me real-world experience - I love it." and Jeimy Victoria described herself "taking on a lot more challenges than I'm used to. It's a wonderful learning experience. There are times when you get stressed out, but then you bounce back."

Finally, let me close by saying that workforce boards across Massachusetts have been doing what we can with what we have and at the same time we know not all of our efforts have been successful. We initiated and are now going through a process to become certified as high performing; we have worked closely with our legislative delegations to secure millions of dollars in state aid for the workforce system—from the Workforce Training Fund to the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund to ABE/ESOL—and have one of the leading states in the nation in terms of leadership and support for skill development. Now we are excited---if not giddy—that we have a person in the White House who understands what this is all about—people and families; jobs and dignity; economic growth and competitiveness; education and lifelong learning. We also need to be realistic in our expectations but ever diligent in our efforts. I am here this morning to say to Congressman Tierney and Jane Oates and all our colleagues in this room, we want to work with you as partners to modernize, tune up and strengthen the workforce system that we all know is so important to the people of Massachusetts and across the nation.

Thank you for “listening”.