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To: Chairman Diegnan and the Assembly Higher Education Committee
From: Christopher Emigholz – Director of Education & Workforce Policy
New Jersey Business & Industry Association (NJBIA)
Date: September 15, 2008
Re: A-591 (Voss, Malone) – Establishes Loan Redemption Program to Encourage Future Teachers to Enter Technology Education Field

Good morning, and thank you for posting this bill and considering NJBIA's perspective. My name is Christopher Emigholz, NJBIA's Director of Education & Workforce Development Policy. On behalf of our more than 22,000 members, I am testifying in strong support of A-591. NJBIA is committed to improving the quality of New Jersey's workforce, and by encouraging future teachers to pursue technology education, this bill will help do that. The Association applauds Assemblywoman Voss and Assemblyman Malone for this innovative way to fill a potential hole in this important group of New Jersey educators.

Technology education is important to the future workforce because technology educators teach the skills that are largely lacking in the current workforce. The NJPRO Foundation just released a report on improving the State business climate entitled "Economic Policies and Solutions" in which they cited the availability of skilled employees as the top concern among employers. Yet in interviews and focus discussions, employers complained about the lack of skilled blue-collar workers in NJ. The report even specifically recommended the expansion of the technically skilled workforce. Furthermore, NJBIA's 2006 Business Outlook Survey showed that less than 1/3 of New Jersey employers were satisfied with the quality of the communications skills, motivation, math and science skills, critical thinking skills and time management skills of their entry-level employees, and only about 1/3 of employers were satisfied with employees straight out of high school. Technology education addresses the lack of blue-collar workers as well as all those deficient workplace skills, and it ultimately will develop higher skilled high school graduates. It exposes students to the skilled trades, gets students motivated and engaged with more hands-on activities, pushes them to express and write about their ideas and creations, forces them to see the applications of math and science, asks them to critically think and solve problems and makes them manage projects.

Unfortunately, New Jersey is facing a potential shortage of these important teachers because many are nearing retirement and not enough are entering the field. The State must do all it can to encourage potential teachers to enter this vital education discipline because the workforce needs them. New Jersey's future engineers, pharmaceutical researchers, architects, utility technicians, inventors and manufacturers will benefit from this bill, because it is a great first step to increase the pool of technology education teachers. And the even better part of this bill and technology education is that all students and careers reap the rewards of a technology education background. As an example, NJBIA often hears that all employees need more problem-solving skills and a better understanding of math, so the entire workforce is better prepared with technology education because those skills that help the future engineer will also help countless other careers as well.

NJBIA thanks you for your support of A-591, a bill that has the potential to improve New Jersey's teaching force and workforce.