

Sara Johannes
Culinary Arts Instructor
Minnesota State Colleges and Universities
1801 Lydia Ave W.
Roseville, MN 55113
Scjohannes@msn.com

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Dear Members of the Jobs and Economic Development Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Culinary Workforce Development Bill (S.F. 5181), which seeks crucial funding for the Healthy Roots Institute (HRI). This initiative is pivotal for the continuation and expansion of HRI's impactful work in our community, including the esteemed VoCul program.

As a culinary arts instructor for Minnesota State, I hear from employers all the time regarding their struggles to find qualified employees for their foodservice positions. These employers are in schools, hospitals, retirement homes, restaurants, stadiums, entertainment venues, and myriad foodservice entities. These are good jobs with great opportunities for advancement, good pay, and benefits. VoCul is doing an excellent job giving their students the skills they need to be successful in these workplaces quickly. It is a vital program that connects those who might not be able to afford the opportunity cost of a formal 2-year culinary arts associate's degree program with the training they need for employment. The Healthy Roots Institute has been putting in the work, building connections between those in need of foodservice training to enter the workforce and those who need employees. I have seen the quality of their instruction firsthand as a volunteer at VoCul. They provide an invaluable service to the community – one that is not being replicated elsewhere. Supporting their efforts is a no-brainer in my eyes. They are providing support right where it needs to be – to those entering the workforce and those creating it.

I strongly urge your support for this initiative. I am confident in its capacity to make a lasting, positive impact on the lives of many and the culinary landscape of our state. The work is already being done well at the VoCul program, but this connection needs more support. It needs your backing to make a lasting impact. It needs this funding to create a strong pipeline of skilled workers with bright futures that can help fill this need.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sara Johannes