

Grant Could Help Unemployed Get Into Health Care Workforce

By **Don Stacom**

NOVEMBER 10, 2014, 4:47 PM

NEW BRITAIN — A new federal grant could help more than 250 long-term unemployed residents of central and northern Connecticut get training for new careers, Capital Workforce Partners announced Monday.

The \$6.7 million grant will also help 45 health care workers — mostly registered nurses — take advanced training to work in specialties with critical shortages, according to Capital Workforce and a series of health care employers in the region.

"Connecticut's economy is coming back, but not fast enough," U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy said at a press conference at the Hospital for Special Care. "This grant will put 250 people back to work with good-paying, full-time health care I.T. jobs."

The state's Congressional delegation helped bring in the labor department grant, which will provide career counseling and computer skills training for the long-term unemployed along with incentives to hospitals and other health care operations that employ them.

The goal is to retrain unemployed residents for jobs at Hartford Hospital, Bristol Hospital, the Visiting Nurses Association, Eastern Connecticut Health Network and other health care providers and businesses in the region. The targeted careers are mostly in computer programming, systems analysis, database management and related fields where the emerging health care I.T. infrastructure is expected to create a huge demand for employment, Capital Workforce said.

"We're entering a new economy where training is a lifelong endeavor," said U.S. Rep. Elizabeth Esty who worked with Murphy and U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal to get the funding. Connecticut this year also got \$5.5 million to help more than 550 long-term unemployed workers in the southern and eastern regions get jobs in high-tech fields.

"It is critical that our neighbors and friends struggling to find work — particularly the long-term unemployed — have the tools they need to re-enter the workforce," Esty said.

Murphy stressed that the objective of both grants is to get residents set up in good-quality jobs.

"We want not just a declining unemployment rate but a declining under-employment rate," said Murphy, who predicted the health care I.T. jobs will provide medical insurance, pensions and other benefits along with solid wages.

"We still have a lot of long-term unemployed people — people who've been out of work one, two, three years," said Tom Phillips, president of Capital Workforce Partners, a non-profit association of business and labor leaders, government officials and educators that oversees public-private partnerships for workforce training.

In addition, the grant will help 45 employed nurses get advanced training to work in ambulatory care, community health and other growing specialties, Capital Workforce said.

Capital Workforce covers Hartford, East Hartford, New Britain, Bristol, Manchester and 32 suburbs and smaller communities in north central and central Connecticut.

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