**TOPIC:** APPROVAL OF STACKABLE CREDENTIAL PATHWAYS REQUIRED BY SB22-192 (OPPORTUNTIES FOR CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT)

**PREPARED BY:** DR. RUTHANNE ORIHUELA, DIRECTOR OF CREDENTIAL PATHWAYS & PRIOR LEARNING INITIATIVES

1. **SUMMARY**

This agenda item recommends approval of five stackable credential pathways pursuant to Senate Bill 22-192 (§C.R.S. 23-5-145.6).

1. **BACKGROUND**

In 2022, Senate Bill 22-192 passed, which calls on the Colorado Department of Higher Education to build ten stackable credential pathways across five growing, high value Colorado industries by January 1, 2025.  CCHE approved the first six of ten pathways in December 2023. The department is seeking CCHE approval of the remaining legislatively obligated four pathways plus an additional one pathway beyond the obligation.

Per CRS 23-5-145.6 (3):

“By January 1, 2024, the department, in consultation with the representatives described in Section 23-5-145.5 (5), shall facilitate the creation of stackable credential pathways for at least three growing industries identified by the most recent Colorado Talent Pipeline report. By January 1, 2025, the department, in consultation with the representatives described in Section 23-5-145.5 (5), shall facilitate the creation of stackable credential pathways for at least two additional growing industries identified by the most recent Colorado Talent Pipeline Report.  The department shall facilitate the creation of at least two stackable credential pathways for each industry.”

Per CRS 23-5-145.6 (4):

“The stackable credential pathways must be approved by the commission, in consultation with the Colorado Work Force Development Council.”

Regarding the stackable credential pathways, statute states the pathways must include “a competency framework that articulates the knowledge, skills, learning outcomes, non-degree credentials, and degrees associated with the pathway, and identifies the career and professional development opportunities associated with the pathway; an inventory of credentials that are a part of the pathway, offered by accredited and non-accredited providers, including training and industry credential providers, high schools, programs recognized by the career development success program pursuant to section 22-54-138, postsecondary institutions and nonprofit organizations; credentials that are a part of the pathway evaluated pursuant to section 23-5-145.5 (3), including credit awarded for courses in GT Pathways or a statewide transfer degree agreement; and credits that are awarded for other courses with a career and technical education focus in a postsecondary degree, non-credit program, or industry certification program.”

The Department established a Stackable Credential Pathways Steering Committee which has convened bimonthly since November 2022 as well as five industry-specific leadership teams that have met monthly to complete the ten required stackable credential pathways in the industries of behavioral health, cybersecurity, education, healthcare, and software development. The Commission approved six stackable credential pathways in behavioral health, cybersecurity, and education in December 2023.

The Department is seeking the Commission’s approval of five stackable credential pathways across healthcare (2 pathways) and software development (3 pathways).  The completion of ten stackable credential pathways is built into the Department’s wildly important goals as a 2023-24 leading indicator for Workforce Development.

1. **STAFF ANALYSIS**

The five stackable credential pathways presented to the Commission were developed via a 15-month collaborative and industry-specific process that engaged a diversity of stakeholders. Stakeholders on the industry-specific stackable credential pathways leadership teams included employers, faculty subject matter experts from two-year and four-year colleges and universities including members of the General Education Council, learner/earners, high school and district teachers and administration, and advocacy organizations such as Attainment Network, Colorado Succeeds, CareerWise Colorado, as well as state agency representatives from Colorado Department of Higher Education, Colorado Community College System, Colorado Workforce Development Council, Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Healthcare Policy and Finance, and Department of Regulatory Agencies. This inclusive and collaborative process of pathway development was founded in an understanding of the equity implications of developing improved navigation through career and training to support Colorado learner/earners through the length of their career and education journey.

1. **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Staff recommends approval of the five stackable credential pathways in healthcare (two pathways) and software development (three pathways) as presented.**

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

§C.R.S. 23-5-145.5 – Opportunities for credential attainment – fund – report - definitions – repeal.

**(1)** As used in this section, unless the context otherwise requires:

**(a)** "Apprenticeship certificate" means verification of completion of an apprenticeship program. Apprenticeship certificates are applicable to industry trades and professions.

**(b)** "Colorado talent report" means the report prepared pursuant to section 24-46.3-103.

**(c)** "Commission on higher education" or "commission" has the same meaning as set forth in section 23-1-101.1 (1).

**(d)** "Department" means the department of higher education created and existing pursuant to section 24-1-114.

**(e)** "Guaranteed-transfer pathways" or "GT pathways" means the statewide articulation matrix system of common course numbering for general education courses described in section 23-1-108.5 (3)(c).

**(f)** "Industry certification" means a credential awarded by an industry-recognized third-party or industry-governing board based on an individual demonstrating by assessment that the individual has acquired the designated knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform a specific occupation or skill. Industry certifications may be time-limited dependent upon the occupation or industry.

**(g)** "Nondegree credential" means a postsecondary certificate, apprenticeship certificate, professional license, or industry certification.

**(h)** "Postsecondary certificate" means a credential awarded by an institution of higher education at an undergraduate level based on completion of all requirements for a program of study, including course work and exams. Postsecondary certificates are not time-limited and do not require renewal. "Postsecondary certificate" does not include a degree and does not include a credential awarded by an institution of higher education after completion of a bachelor's degree in the same pathway.

**(i)** "Stackable credential pathway" means a sequence of credentials earned through various means, including through assessment of prior learning, that may be accumulated over time and move an individual along a career pathway or up a career ladder. **(j)** "State institution of higher education" or "institution" has the same meaning as set forth in section 23-1-135 (2).

**(k)** "Statewide degree transfer agreement" means a statewide degree transfer agreement described in section 23-1-108 (7).

**(2)** By June 15, 2023, the department, in consultation with institutions and at least one business organization or representative of industry, shall develop and implement a process that encourages institutions to identify incremental achievements on the path to degree completion and organize stackable credentials that build upon each other toward degrees and may articulate to pathways in high-demand industries. The department and institutions shall collaborate to identify how credentials may be evaluated for their component skills, competencies, and learning outcomes, and then may become stacked into a stackable credential pathway to provide increased access to employment and may result in a degree. As a part of the process, the department and institutions shall: **(a)** Evaluate the quality of nondegree credentials that are currently available that lead to in-demand living wage jobs identified in the most recent Colorado talent report and respond to critical job shortages in Colorado. The department, in collaboration with institutions, shall evaluate the quality of nondegree credentials using the framework and process created in this subsection (2) and informed by one or more quality standards frameworks developed by national organizations. **(b)(I)** Identify where alignment currently exists along a degree pathway between nondegree and degree credentials and work-based learning and apprenticeships; and **(II)** Identify opportunities to develop where further alignment may be created between nondegree and degree credentials and work-based learning and apprenticeships; and **(c)** Articulate where the various alignments identified in subsection (1)(b) of this section may incorporate into stackable credential pathways that may lead to a degree and opportunities for credits to be transferred in order for persons to be able to attain nondegree or degree credentials that lead to in-demand or living wage jobs.

**(3)** By January 1, 2024, the department, in consultation with the representatives described in section 23-5-145.5 (5), shall facilitate the creation of stackable credential pathways for at least three growing industries identified by the most recent Colorado talent report. By January 1, 2025, the department, in consultation with the representatives described in section 23-5-145.5 (5), shall facilitate the creation of stackable credential pathways for at least two additional growing industries identified by the most recent Colorado talent report. The department shall facilitate the creation of at least two stackable credential pathways for each industry. The stackable credential pathways must include:**(a)** A competency framework that articulates the knowledge, skills, learning outcomes, nondegree credentials, and degrees associated with the pathway and identifies the career and professional development opportunities associated with the pathway; **(b)** An inventory of credentials that are a part of the pathway, offered by accredited and nonaccredited providers, including training and industry credential providers, high schools, programs recognized by the career development success program pursuant to section 22-54-138, postsecondary institutions, and nonprofit organizations; **(c)** Credentials that are a part of the pathway evaluated pursuant to section 23-5-145.5 (3), including credit awarded for courses in GT pathways or a statewide degree transfer agreement; and **(d)** Credits that are awarded for other courses with a career and technical education focus in a postsecondary degree, noncredit program, or industry certification program.

**(4)** The stackable credential pathways must be approved by the commission, in consultation with the Colorado work force development council.

**(5)(a)** The credentials to support the Colorado jobs cash fund, referred to in this section as the "fund", is created in the state treasury. The fund consists of money credited to the fund pursuant to subsection (5)(b) of this section and any other money that the general assembly appropriates or transfers to the fund. **(b)** For the 2022-23 state fiscal year, the general assembly shall appropriate one million dollars to the department from the workers, employers, and workforce centers cash fund created in section 24-75-231. The department shall use this appropriation for the purposes described in this section. **(c)** The state treasurer shall credit all interest and income derived from the deposit and investment of money in the fund to the fund. **(d)** Subject to annual appropriation by the general assembly, the department may expend money from the fund for the purposes described in this section.

**(6)** On or before December 29, 2023, and on or before December 31, 2025, the department of higher education shall submit a report to the education committees of the senate and house of representatives, or any successor committees, regarding the implementation of this section. The report must include data collected by institutions to measure the total number of credits, credentials, certificates, and professional licenses earned in each pathway at each institution, as practicable. The report must include the data for the state as a whole and for each institution, in total and disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender.

**(7)(a)** Nothing in this section supersedes or replaces the curriculum or program standards of a construction industry registered apprenticeship program that is registered and approved by the United States department of labor or the state apprenticeship agency. **(b)** Nothing in this section supersedes or replaces any statutory or regulatory training requirement for a professional license or credential regulated by the department of regulatory agencies.

**(8)** This section is repealed, effective July 1, 2026.

*C.R.S. § 23-5-145.6*