EXHIBIT 4
DATE 2-15-05
HB 589

Testimony of Arlene Parisot
Director of Workforce Development and 2-Year Education
Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

On Behalf of the Commissioner of Higher Education, I rise in opposition to HB 589.

We do appreciate one of the intentions of this legislation which is to bring better collaboration to the state's workforce programs. We in the university system pledge to continue working hard to improve the way we interact with other agencies and partner with Montana businesses.

But HB 589 goes too far, too fast. The way to develop better collaboration is to continue building partnerships, not force every program through one entity that may not be the best equipped to administer it. Of particular concern to us is the provision that all federal funds come through the one stop system. I know that there are amendments to clarify this to mean only US Department of Labor funds, but even that is a concern.

For example, the President's Community Based Job Training Grants program will make funds available to build much needed capacity at our 2-year colleges. These grants for 2-year colleges will come from the US Department of Labor. While these grants will require strategic partnerships with industry, K-12, and other workforce training programs in the state, we think forcing the grants to come through a third party in the state simply adds to complexity and bureaucracy instead of lessening it. It also makes less total funds available for actual program development and customized training.

HB 589 would also add a layer of bureaucracy to accessing the Governor's discretionary Workforce Investment Act funds, which we have used in the past to improve our training of healthcare workers.

Again, while we applaud the intention of creating a seamless workforce system in Montana, this bill would create confusion and added complexity for us and we urge you to table this legislation.