

# UTEC Asks Legislators to Support Mattress Recycling, Jobs in Bill Filed by Vargas, Kennedy



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*Jamie Vazquez, a young adult at UTEC, testifies before the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. With him are UTEC's Chief Social Enterprise Officer Ricardo Febles and Ana Victoria Morales. (Courtesy photograph.)*

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UTEC, a nonprofit operating in Haverhill, Lawrence and Lowell, and one of three organizations selected by the state Department of Environmental Protection as an approved mattress recycler, sent representatives to testify Wednesday in favor of an act to promote the future success of mattress recycling in the state.

The bill, filed by Lowell Sen. Edward Kennedy and Haverhill Rep. Andy X. Vargas, creates a state commission to assess and improve the state's mattress disposal practices, supports recycling partnerships with nonprofits and social enterprises that provide employment for returning citizens and individuals facing high barriers to employment and covers costs through a mattress recycling fee. Jamie Vazquez told legislators the Mattress Recycling Social Enterprise at UTEC has had a "huge impact" on his life.

"My journey with them actually started while I was still incarcerated. After coming home, I did everything I could to find a job. I made calls, sent out applications, but never even got an interview. When I reached out to UTEC's Reentry team, they came through right away and connected me with the Mattress Recycling Warehouse," he said.

Vazquez explained he has picked up valuable skills such as how to drive delivery trucks and operate forklifts and other equipment.

UTEC's mission is to reduce repeat criminal offenses and advance criminal justice reform.

"This bill is a results driven approach to both environmental justice and economic opportunity," said Vargas. "By supporting social enterprises who are leading in mattress recycling statewide, we are not only reducing waste and protecting our planet, but we are also creating pathways to employment for young people in our communities who've been systemically disadvantaged."

Kennedy said the bill is "a smart investment in environmental justice, public health and turning waste into opportunity."