



MASSACHUSETTS

Workforce Investment Act

WIA Communication No. 04-24

☒ **Policy** ☐ **Information**

To: Chief Elected Officials
Workforce Investment Board Chairs
Workforce Investment Board Directors
Title I Administrators
Career Center Directors
Title I Fiscal Officers
DCS Regional Directors
DCS Area Directors

cc: WIA State Partners

From: Susan V. Lawler, Commissioner
Division of Career Services

John A. King, Commissioner
Division of Unemployment Assistance

Date: March 25, 2004

Subject: Mandatory Policies for Press Inquiries related to Unemployment Insurance Claimants and Functions. Recommended Policies and Procedures for Press Inquiries not related to Unemployment Insurance Claimants and Functions.

Policy: Jobs, workforce training and the economy as a whole generate news for print, radio and television media. The attached Media Policy and Procedures Guide describes both mandatory and recommended policies and practices for Career Center operators and staff responding to press inquiries. The guide is being issued to ensure that Career Center operators and staff are knowledgeable of mandated and recommended media protocols and that accurate information is disseminated in response to press inquiries.

Career Center operators and staff are reminded that all individual UI claimant information is considered *confidential* and is statutorily protected. Therefore, all policies respective of the privacy of UI claimants' information iterated in the attached guide must be adhered to, *regardless of staff affiliation*.

While this issuance provides recommended press guidelines for non-UI related Career Center functions, local Workforce Investment Boards and Career Centers should strongly consider developing their own formal policies and procedures, if they have not already done so.

Career Center operators and staff are reminded that official economic data and related press releases are publicly available on the DCS/DUA web site, www.detma.org.

Action

Required: Please disseminate this information to appropriate staff.

Effective: Immediately

Inquiries: Any inquiries regarding this issuance should be directed to Linnea Walsh, Press Secretary, Departments of Labor and Workforce Development Secretariat, at (617) 727-6573 or at Linnea.Walsh@state.ma.us.

Filing: Please file this in your notebook of previously issued WIA Communications Series Issuances as 04-24.

MEDIA POLICY AND PROCEDURES GUIDE

Division of Career Services (DCS) and Division of Unemployment Assistance (DUA)

Jobs, workforce training and the economy as a whole generate news for print, radio and television media. To ensure compliance with statutorily protected confidentiality rights for individual UI claimants and to assure dissemination of accurate information related to economic data, the following policy and procedures are being issued.

DWD Press Secretary, Linnea Walsh is available to assist Career Center personnel with general press inquiries. Any inquiries from the press regarding specific DCS and DUA functions, activities, policies and/or procedures should be directed to Linnea who can be reached at 617-727-6573 or by e-mail at linnea.walsh@state.ma.us.

Mandatory Policy for Career Center Operators and Staff

During a period of economic uncertainty, on either the national or state level, reporters will likely wish to visit One-Stop Career Centers to interview unemployment insurance claimants. State law protects the privacy of unemployment insurance claimants. As a result, claimant privacy guidelines must be followed by not only DCS and DUA staff, but by *all* Career Center staff. Therefore, all Career Center staff must adhere to the following policies:

- ✓ Career Center staff can neither confirm nor deny whether a particular individual has ever filed an unemployment claim or is a claimant.
- ✓ Reporters cannot be allowed to attend an unemployment insurance orientation or hearing or observe an individual actually filing an unemployment claim. Even if a claimant has invited a reporter to attend or observe, permission can not be granted.
- ✓ Career Center staff can discuss unemployment issues in generalities, but cannot refer to or identify specific individual claimants.

Recommended Practices for Career Center Operators and Staff

The Division of Career Services and Division of Unemployment Assistance seek to balance the strict confidentiality of claimants' information with the need to promote important services being provided by the One-Stop Career Centers. Therefore, the following practices are recommended to assure an appropriate balance between individual privacy requirements and the Career Centers' need and desire to promote their valuable services.

On-Site Media Visits

- ✓ The news media has a legal right to observe, photograph and interview in a public venue such as a sidewalk or parking lot outside the facility. Nonetheless, reporters and their camera crews cannot simply enter a Career Center and approach customers – even though a One-Stop Career Center is considered a “public place”. Although a public place, Career Center managers may regulate the logistics of a visit to include what time of day and the amount of access to the facility.
- ✓ If customers agree to be interviewed, photographed or filmed, it is recommended that Career Center management have each individual sign a release form granting permission. A copy of each release form should be kept on file at the particular Career Center.
- ✓ Group shots of a workshop should be taken from the rear unless every member of the group gives permission to be photographed or filmed and signs a release granting permission.
- ✓ A reporter may attend a workshop as long as participation is *not* restricted to unemployment insurance claimants. However, staff and participants should be notified of media presence in advance. Ground rules should be set in advance, as needed, by the Career Center director or his/her designee, and might include, for example, referring to participants by first name only and no personal (identifying) stories, etc.

Media Contact: Press Releases/Media Advisories

- ✓ Career Center directors will often times be asked about the local economy, specifically and/or the Massachusetts economy, in general. To help provide the media with the most accurate information, DUA issues a monthly press release announcing the state’s unemployment rate and other related economic data. This current data can be viewed and downloaded from the DCS/DUA website, www.detma.org. Specific inquiries regarding the Massachusetts unemployment rate and other economic data can be referred to DUA Chief Economist Elliot Winer, who can be reached at 617-626-6558 or by e-mail at ewiner@detma.org.
- ✓ The Division of Career Services and Division of Unemployment Assistance in coordination with the Departments of Labor and Workforce Development secretariat may issue press releases on specific agency initiatives to appropriate media and community organizations.
- ✓ Career Center operators are encouraged to take proactive steps to promote their facilities, programs and services. It is recommended that One-Stop Career Center directors or their liaisons forward copies of advisories and flyers promoting upcoming events and provide related information to Press Secretary, Linnea Walsh.

Public Information Requests

The Massachusetts Public Records Law allows a government agency up to 10 days to respond to a public information request. In the event Career Center managers receive a written public information request, and in order to determine whether or not the request is pertinent to any DCS or DUA administered programs (and potentially subject to the policies and guidelines described above), a copy of the request should be maintained at the Career Center, a copy forwarded to DWD Press Secretary, Linnea Walsh and the original request forwarded to:

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