

**MassHire State Workforce Board Meeting**

Thursday, December 3, 2020

9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Virtual Meeting (via WebEx)

**Meeting Minutes**

***Members Present (logged in):***

*Rosalin Acosta, Jesse Brown, James Cassetta, Sherry Dong, Pam Eddinger, Pamela Everhart, Jessyca Feliciano, Ann-Margaret Ferrante, Maria Ferreira-Bedard, Rainer Gawlick, Robert LePage, Eric Lesser, Juliette Mayers, Jennifer Morales, Catherine Mick, Radhames Nova, Warren Pepicelli, Sherri Pitcher, Joanne Pokaski, Elizabeth Skidmore, Marylou Sudders, Juan Vega, Maicharia Weir Lytle, Beth Williams, Ray Wrobel*

***Members Absent:***

*Zamawa Arenas, Joanne Berwald, Anne Broholm, Axel Grippo, John Mann, Dan Rivera, Janice Weekes*

***Guests and Staff***

*Rebecca Bialecki, Heather Boulger, Jenna Borkoski, Eli Cole, Migdalia Diaz, Jennifer Hansen, Jennifer James, Susan Lange, Kathie Mainzer, Kristen McKenna, Ken Messina, Patrick Mitchell, David Muldrew, Douglas Peters, Laura Reiman, Nathan Skrocki, Karen Shack, Sacha Stadhard, , Alice Sweeney, Marina Zhavoronkova*

**Welcome & Introductions**

Joanne Pokaski called the meeting to order then reviewed the meeting agenda. Ms. Pokaski and Cheryl Scott quizzed the Board members and guests on the role of the state workforce board based on the recent U.S. Department of Labor training on workforce system governance.

**Workforce Development Update**

Secretary Acosta provided an update on the Massachusetts economy as the fallout from the pandemic is being sorted out and trends start to emerge. The Massachusetts unemployment rate went from 2.8% in March of 2020, to 17.7% in June and back down to 7.4% in October.  In June there were 521,000 UI claimants, and that number continues to decline as more and more Massachusetts get back to work. In October, there were 225,690 UI claimants – over a 50% reduction. From February 2020 through April 2020 nearly 700,000 total jobs were lost in Massachusetts. From April through August, around 41 percent of private sector jobs were added back. Secretary Acosta also reviewed recent job losses and gains by industry sector, highlighting job gains in Financial Activities, and job losses in Leisure and Hospitality, Retail, Food and Accommodation which experienced the largest job losses during the pandemic. These sectors employed more women and people of color who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The unemployment rate for Whites in the Commonwealth was about 7.9%, whereas the Black unemployment rate is up to 11.3% and the Latino unemployment rate is at 14.1%. Women make up 53% of UI claimants; this point a year ago, women were 44% of UI claimants. EOLWD is laser focused on addressing some of the widening opportunity gaps in the Commonwealth.

Secretary Acosta shared that the Baker Administration is making new investments to build workforce skills, grow training programs and pathways, forge new partnerships between employers and workers, and support internet connectivity to facilitate remote work and online career advancement. The over $25 million includes $10.4 million to engage Massachusetts anchor employers to create aligned statewide training-employment pathways; $9.2 million to subsidize internet for low-income populations, and to expand hot spots in unserved and underserved communities; $3.2 million to modernize MassHire virtual pathways to assess and connect UI claimants to appropriate services and supports; and $2 million to bolster manufacturing training by purchasing a standardized virtual training program to increase workforce for manufacturing sector.

Secretary Acosta reviewed the Governor’s revised FY 2021 budget proposal which is currently being negotiated in the House and Senate in conference. These investments take on a new importance as the Commonwealth’s economy continues to recover from the impact of COVID-19. It is clear that the Legislature agrees that training the unemployed for new in demand careers is a priority as the House funded the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund at $7 million and the Senate funded it at $10 million. In addition, the Legislature has followed historically high funding levels for training, by funding YouthWorks at $20 million in the Senate budget and $19.5 million in the House.

As part of our ongoing effort to move from job loss to job gain, EOLWD has partnered with Coursera, a training platform that offers online, self-paced training courses in a variety of career pathways and interests. Coursera licenses were made available to MassHire customers who have until the end of the calendar year to complete their coursework.

Meanwhile, EOLWD continues to ensure that DUA has the staffing and resources to operate effectively and efficiently, including addressing fraud. If you or someone you know are a victim of UI Fraud, please report the fraud using DUA’s secure online form, which can be accessed by visiting the DUA website: <mass.gov/dua>.

**Addressing the Childcare Crisis**

Commissioner of the Department of Early Education and Childcare (EEC) Samantha Aigner-Treworgy presented on the childcare landscape in Massachusetts, including childcare capacity, and childcare infrastructure. Prior to COVID-19, childcare capacity was 250,000 children, but that capacity is decreasing as child care providers have faced challenges; only 82% of the providers have returned to the market. In response to the challenges posed by COVID-19, such as children attending school remotely, the Governor’s issued an [Executive Order](https://www.mass.gov/doc/august-28-2020-supporting-parents-with-children-in-remote-learning) to allow the provision of childcare during the school day to support remote learners. Further EEC provides subsidized childcare to over 55,000 children from low-income families, but there is currently a long waitlist. The childcare business model requires providers and childcare centers to operate at full enrollment in order to be economically viable, and have a workforce of trained and qualified workers to support the facility. Both aspects of the business model have been challenged, particularly in a COVID-19 environment. Centers could not operate at full-capacity to meet social-distancing requirements, and demand has dipped while families opted to keep children at home because they could no longer afford childcare. Meanwhile, childcare centers have had staffing challenges due to the lack of individuals with the proper qualifications and increased need for workers to operate in a COVID-19 environment.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stressed that we’re not going back to pre-COVID landscape given new requirements for screening, cleaning, social distancing, etc. Innovation and new models are needed to address the childcare challenge as work changes and child care continues to be a critical enabler of employment and economic recovery. Solutions include public-private partnerships, investments in alternative business models, and investments to support the childcare infrastructure. Changing how the childcare works for low income families could also have a positive impact, such as flexible childcare enrollment and attendance, extending subsidized childcare eligibility to include job search, public sector support for parental leave and childcare subsidies. Businesses also play a critical role, such as ensuring flexible scheduling for working parents, and supporting investments in childcare; more engagement with business is needed on this issue.

Secretary Acosta pointed out that COVID-19 has forced a reckoning that childcare is not just a women’s issue, and this is a moment to have more public-private partnerships. Childcare is critical and this will be part of the conversation as we look to economic recovery. We are looking at decreased number of people served in the workforce system due to decreased demand. EOLWD is trying to figure out why, but the suspicion is that a big part is because of childcare.

Jennifer James shared in the meeting chat that “one question that has come up across is about innovative programs. Are there state supports that could help an employer set up "pods" within its own workers in workers' homes where there is trust between coworkers on safety practices[sic]”. We heard this practice from some of the employers in MA (like an internal company "facebook" to link up and create pods). Is there funding for tutors at home or tools companies could use to set up this type of internal practice?”

Senator Lesser stressed that this is a humanitarian emergency given the scale of need and amount of work we need to do. Perhaps Americorps could be a solution.How much of this is a function of workforce not being paid enough; if the pay was higher pay, would supply/demand issue be addressed? And, how much of the drop off in childcare usage is about cost or that families are scared of virus spreading?

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgyresponded that from chilcare workforce standpointit is a pay issue. Being a childcare worker is a hard job, and the pay is very much on EEC’s radar. Americorp would be a stop gap, en route to a longer term solution. If operating on the margins, then Americorps could help. With regard to parent demand, it’s hard to tell why it’s decreasing, and varies between demographics, geography, and the provider relationship. Is there a way to subsidized this workforce? Currently, federal subsidies can’t be used for this.

Douglas Peters added via chat “Many Americorps programs are also subject to non-displacement rules, so they can't fill a role that is also a paid position within a school or organization. Unless those restrictions were lessened.”

Liz Skidmore shared that the Carpenters Union has piloted a program to address the childcare needs of union members -- [carethatworks.org](https://carethatworks.org/).But there is so much demand that supply cannot keep up. We need more public investment. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy added that it matters how we invest. Per child funding is not going to sustain the infrastructure needed for comprehensive childcare, so what are alternative models we can learn from other industries?

Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante pointed out that some allowances may be able to shift to childcare, and we may be able restructure things, but we need to advocate at the federal level.

Joanne Pokaski noted that childcare plays an important role in connecting people with jobs that are looking for work into these fields that are hiring.

**Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Joanne Pokaski called for a motion to approve the meeting minutes for the September 24, 2020 meeting minutes. James Cassetta made the motion to approved, the motion was passed, and approved unanimously through voice and chat vote.

**Adult Pathways Committee Update & Discussion**

Jim Cassetta and Rainer Gawlick updated the Board on the work of the Adult Pathways Committee who has been focusing on addressing the digital divide. The Committee interviewed 12 MassHire Career Center leadership to better understand the ways in which MassHire customers are facing digital inclusion challenges, and how the MassHire Centers are addressing these challenges. The Committee concluded that the digital divide is real and the MassHire Centers are using a variety of ways to address growing need for access to computers, the internet, and digital literacy. The consensus is that there is an opportunity for this issue to be addressed at-scale, statewide. The Committee shared preliminary recommendations on how the Commonwealth could address the digital divide, including raising resources, and developing partnerships to provide access to broadband internet, internet-ready computers, and digital literacy. The Committee also noted the importance of ensuring language access, tracking data, and evaluating outcomes.

Secretary Acosta noted in the chat that $9M of recovery funds have been allocated to address digital inclusion. She commended the Committee on their work, particularly in taking the time to interview the system and bring to light things that are working well, and areas of need. Multi-lingual access couldn’t be more evident now and when we think about training, we always need to have this in mind. The dollars that have been set aside are really important, and digital literacy needs to be a part of the solution. We can have hardware, but if they can’t read the information or use a computer, it’s not going to help.

Sherry Dong noted via chat that Massachusetts “has the 2nd largest Cambodian community in the country. And large Chinese and Vietnamese communities.” She hopes those top the Asian languages are included when considering language access. Catherine Mick also noted via chat that ASL is needed as well.

Bob LePage shared that the workforce challenge is aligning to school challenge, and we need to think about adult education differently. It is going to be a different system, especially when thinking about the adult education open and competitive process. This is the time to re-think how the 20,000-25,000 adult education students engage with an adult education system that needs to be re-engineered from the student’s perspective. Kristen McKenna added via chat “Having a partnership between community colleges and career centers could be a good way to address this[sic] goals. [Community Colleges] especially those with ABE programs have education expertise.”

Joanne Pokaski asked if WIOA funds and Workforce Competitiveness Trust Funds can we be more to address this challenge. $9M is great way to start, but we need to think about ongoing funds to support the need in a sustainable manner.

On chat, Alice Sweeney noted that the work of the committee is helping MassHire as they are structuring the Road to Reemployment initiative; it helps to make informed decisions as they look to new IT solutions. Jennifer James added in the chat that “MassHire has been working with Harvard on a website resource called SkillBase which offers a way to navigate free, online resources for 1) ESOL learning 2) digital literacy training/technical skills and 3) career navigation. Several regions piloted a rollout to customers. We will train all of MassHire regions on that platform in the next few months. [https://skillbase.hks.harvard.edu](https://skillbase.hks.harvard.edu/)/”.

**Board Committees Discussion**

Joanne Pokaski and Cheryl Scott presented on the proposed structure and charge for the Board committees. The recommendation is to sunset the Workforce Intelligence Committee now that EOLWD is working on enhancing capacity to provide labor market information in a timely and accessible manner, a key objective for the Committee. Among the proposal were charges for each of the remaining Board committees – MassHire Performance, Adult Pathways, Youth Pathways and Workforce System Modernization. Ms. Pokaski accepted a motion to accept the committee structure and charge, the Board approved the motion unanimously through voice and chat vote.

Ms. Pokaski adjourned the meeting at 11:26 a.m.