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**MassHire State Workforce Board Meeting**

Thursday, June 4, 2020

9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Virtual Meeting (via WebEx)

**Meeting Minutes**

*(Draft)*

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

*Rosalin Acosta, Zamawa Arenas, Joanne Berwald, Anne Broholm, Jesse Brown, Donna Cupelo, James Cassetta, Pamela Everhart, Jessyca Feliciano, Ann-Margaret Ferrante, Maria Ferreira-Bedard, Rainer Gawlick, Axel Grippo, Robert LePage, Juliette Mayers, Catherine Mick , Jennifer Morales, Radhames Nova, Warren Pepicelli, Joanne, Pokaski, Juan Vega, Janice Weekes, Beth Williams, Ray Wrobel*

***Members Absent:***

*Sherry Dong, Pam Eddinger, Eric Lesser, John Mann, Sherri Pitcher, Dan Rivera, Elizabeth Skidmore, Maicharia Weir Lytle*

**Welcome & Introductions**

Donna Cupelo called the meeting to order and provided instructions for virtual meeting attendance. Ms. Cupelo announced her upcoming retirement from Verizon and resignation from the Board effective August 1, 2020. The Board will be notified when Governor Baker appoints a new Chair of the Board. Board members and guests chatted their congratulations and well wishes to Ms. Cupelo.

Cheryl Scott thanked Donna Cupelo for her many years of service to the Board. She announced that the MassHire Awards have been rescheduled to July 23 and will be held virtually. Board members will be sent an event invitation, and are encouraged to attend.

**Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Donna Cupelo called for a motion to approve the meeting minutes for the January 13, 2020 and March 9, 2020 meeting minutes. The motion was made, and approved unanimously through voice and chat vote.

**2020 WIOA State Plan – Update and Vote**

Jennifer James presented an update on the 2020 WIOA State Plan. She reviewed the purpose, vision, goals, and strategies of the plan and developments since the last Board meeting in March, including final submission to the federal agencies on March 27, 2020.

Ms. Cupelo asked Ms. James to comment on the feedback received at the last Board meeting. Ms. James responded that additions were made to the labor market section of the state plan in response to Joanne Pokaski’s comments. Ms. Pokaski added that she worked with Cheryl to add language to the plan to ensure that section adequately covered the areas of concern, namely analysis on the foreign-born workforce. Ms. James also commented that there was follow-up with Liz Skidmore in response to her concerns on how apprenticeship was featured in the state plan. Upon further discussion, much of her concerns were regarding the Governor’s Career Technical Institute proposed in the FY 21 state budget.

There was question about whether Massachusetts will be asked to amend the State Plan due to the change in the economy. Ms. James responded that the federal government will not ask for a formal amendment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but WIOA will require Massachusetts to submit a modification to the state plan in two years; changes in the economy will be reflected in that document.

Ms. Cupelo noted that since a quorum was not present in the room at the March 9th Board meeting, as required of Open Meeting Law at the time, a formal vote by the Board to approve the plan had not taken place. As a result of the COVID-19 emergency orders, Governor Baker waived the in-person requirement for public bodies, thus a vote via virtual meeting could take place. Ms. Cupelo therefore asked for a motion to vote on approval of the 2020 WIOA State Plan. Ms. Pokaski made the motion, seconded by Ms. Everhart. Members present voted to approve the 2020 WIOA State Plan through voice and chat vote, except Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante who abstained.

**The Commonwealth and COVID-19: Update & Discussion**

Secretary Acosta provided an update on COVID-19 impacts on the Massachusetts Labor Force, noting the stark increase in unemployment and decline in labor force participation. She presented the increase in UI claimants, pointing out the increase among claimants of color and those in service occupations. She provided an update on shifts in the UI system and administration to help stabilize individuals who have lost their jobs. Efforts include virtual UI Town Halls, frequent update of information on the DUA website, and multilingual services like UI Online in Spanish, translations of the DUA website and UI information in multiple languages, and UI Town Halls conducted in Spanish and Portuguese. All UI call takers were moved to working remotely, staffing increased, and other agency staff were dispatched to DUA to provide additional support in helping claimants.

The challenge moving forward as the economy reopens is on securing employment for the large number of individuals who have been permanently laid off from work. This will involve accelerating the workforce system modernization efforts identified in the WIOA State plan and capitalizing on the MassHire brand to broaden reach to job seekers and businesses.

Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante praised Donna Cupelo’s accomplishments, including her work to advance women. In response to Secretary Acosta’s comments about the COVID-19 crisis, Rep. Ferrante mentioned that this will serve as a reference point for when things get difficult. She has never seen anything like the past couple of months, and commends Secretary Acosta and her team on their efforts to ramp up a quick response. Her office went from about three UI calls a month to 20 – 40 calls in a day. The big concern for her is when July hits and the expanded benefits expire. Yet, there is opportunity, perhaps to train workers displaced from one field into growing fields.

Ms. Cupelo then asked Board members to comment on their experience with coping with and addressing the COVID-19 crisis in their field. Anne Broholm echoed commendations for DUA as her employees at AHEAD, LLC were laid off due to the mandated company shut down. Prior to the pandemic, AHEAD employed 245 employees, 70 of which were laid off during the pandemic; most of which were front line, hourly wage employees. The company has been working with the employees as they transition to receiving UI benefits. The company began opening back up on May 18th and has been a WorkShare “super user” to assist in transitioning employees from unemployment to working part-time without a steep decline in income. Ms. Broholm notes the lack of widespread use of the program despite the benefit of being able to bring employees back to the company and maintain a lower FTE count. AHEAD, LLC has been using a staggered schedule to allow for social distancing, and WorkShare has allowed for this safety precaution while removing barriers to return to work. Out 70 employees, only 3 didn’t return primarily due to medical or childcare issues, or because they found work elsewhere. She is also happy to report that golf is having a moment as an allowed activity under social distancing guidelines.

Joanne Pokaski noted that her experience with the COVID impact started at last workforce board meeting; she realized her company, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, issued guidance that did not permit employees to attend large meetings while in the midst of the last Board meeting. By the end of that week, BIDMC shut down elective procedures as they prepared for addressing COVID healthcare needs. Thankfully, the number of COVID cases is now moving in the right direction. She praised the courage and bravery of healthcare workers, and allied health workers. BIDMC’s response has gone through phases, putting workers on paid furloughs and making leaves available. There remain financial concerns; because BIDMC shut down so many things, they were operating at a loss, which is leading to a financial reckoning. The second challenge is responding to racism and injustice; BIDMC has responded by supporting employees, issuing emails from leadership, and building out opportunities for dialogue in the organization’s role in building a just society. She is proud of BIDM for stepping up on these issues.

Pam Everhart of Fidelity Investments notes that the company is seeing many responding to uncertainty about the stock market. But she also notes that Fidelity is seeing customers take advantage of new opportunities in the CARES Act, which allows for withdrawal from 401Ks. For Fidelity, this translates to an increased need to hire employees to serve customers that need help. Ms. Everhart also noted that she participated in the Governor’s Re-Opening Task Force. It was an awesome experience with great leaders involved including Lieutenant Governor Polito and Secretary Kennealy, but it was a very involved experience. There were about 40 to 50 hours of Zoom calls, and 75 briefings with stakeholders. From a business perspective, tough decisions had to be made on childcare and transportation. Ms. Everhart commended Secretary Pollack on the wonderful job trying to balance public safety concerns. The Task Force blueprint has been released, but they continue to engage stakeholders. She is happy to bring feedback from the board to the Task Force.

Jim Cassetta of WORK, Inc. reported that they have 620 employees and the majority are people of color who are feeling pressured by the pandemic and recent events. WORK, Inc. provides direct care and support to 1200 individuals with disabilities. 72 staff have contracted COVID-19. WORK, Inc. has been able to move forward with minimal layoffs. Unfortunately, 57 clients and 2 employees of WORK have passed away. Mr. Cassetta noted concerned about July 1 which is when the “hazard pay” to care for individuals runs out, yet the need for care will continue.

Other attendees chimed in on the discussion via chat noting similar challenges with functioning in a post-COVID environment.

Ms. Cupelo recognized that the impact of COVID-19 will take shape over next month and year and suggests a more detailed discussion at a future Board meeting. The committees will work with Secretary Acosta, the new Chair and Cheryl on what comes next.

Ms. James provided a brief overview of upcoming MassHire virtual service pathway that is in development. This is in direct response to the need to expand remote and virtual services for MassHire customers while anticipating an influx of people turning to the system for re-employment services. Ms. Cupelo suggested that another update on this topic be provided at the next Board meeting in September due to lack of time to cover this topic in entirety at this Board meeting.

Ms. Cupelo adjourned the meeting at 11:03 a.m.