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**MassHire State Workforce Board Meeting**

Thursday, September 24, 2020

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

Virtual Meeting (via WebEx)

**Meeting Minutes**

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

*Rosalin Acosta, Zamawa Arenas, Joanne Berwald, Anne Broholm, Jesse Brown, James Cassetta, Sherry Dong, Pamela Everhart, Jessyca Feliciano, Ann-Margaret Ferrante, Maria Ferreira-Bedard, Rainer Gawlick, Axel Grippo, Robert LePage, Eric Lesser, Marylou Sudders, Jennifer Morales, Radhames Nova, Warren Pepicelli, Joanne Pokaski, Elizabeth Skidmore, Juan Vega, Janice Weekes, Maicharia Weir Lytle, Ray Wrobel*

***Members Absent:***

*Pam Eddinger, John Mann, Juliette Mayers, Sherri Pitcher, Dan Rivera, Beth Williams*

***Guests and Staff***

*Steve Aalto, Christine Abrams, Lorraine Albert, Heather Boulger, Jenna Borkoski, Robert Bower, Bruce Bergwall, Migdalia Diaz, Lydia Emmons, Keenen Grooms, Jennifer Hanson, Patricia Hart, Jennifer James, Kathie Mainzer, Liz May, Patrick Mitchell, MJC, David Muldrew, Douglas Peters, Abadur Rahman, Donna Ramos, Karen Shack, Sacha Stadhard, Sheila Sullivan-Jardim, Jeff Turgeon, Marina Zhavoronkova*

**Welcome & Introductions**

Secretary Acosta announced that Joanne Pokaski has been appointed as the new Chair of the MassHire State Workforce Board. Ms. Pokaski is the Senior Director of Workforce Development and Community Relations at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. She is also a longstanding member of the MassHire State Workforce Board, and Boston’s local workforce board. Board members and guests congratulated Ms. Pokaski on her new position. Ms. Pokaski called the meeting to order then reviewed the meeting agenda.

Cheryl Scott updated the Board on re-appointments, and requested on feedback on enhancing the online meeting experience. The next Board meeting is scheduled for December 3rd, and will be held virtually.

**Workforce Development Update**

Secretary Acosta provided an update on the Massachusetts workforce landscape, including employment by industry, unemployment, and how COVID-19 has impacted the economic landscape. COVID-19 induced recession is different than the Great Recession in the industries impacted, and the workers affected. Among the unemployed, there are disparities by race, ethnicity, and education, with people of color and those with less than a high school education over-represented among those not working. Of the 1 million jobs lost since the pandemic, about 50% have come back, with a significant number of those unemployed projected to be long-term unemployed; women, people of color, and those who worked in accommodation and food services are expected to make up a significant share of the long-term unemployed.

Secretary Acosta also shared that the Regional Planning teams have met to review the labor market data in light of the pandemic and adjust the priority industries and occupations, if necessary. All but two regions re-affirmed the original direction. Each region noted that COVID-19 has created challenges with providing training, particularly with training that relies on in-person or hands-on instruction. Also, those seeking work are experiencing challenges with childcare and increased reliance on technology.

To address the childcare challenge, Governor Baker signed an [Executive Order](https://mailchi.mp/b1958f0b8c81/press-release-eec-expand-child-care-options) to provide expanded childcare options for children attending school remotely. Additionally, all MassHire Career Centers remain open virtually to serve those looking for work.

Sherry Dong asked for unemployment data for Asian Pacific Americans. Secretary Acosta responded that she will try to get that data.

Marylou Sudders, Secretary of Health and Human Services, pointed out that regionally the UI data and COVID rates can differ. Springfield, for example, does not have high rates of COVID, but it does have high rates of unemployment.

**The MassHire Career Center Evolution**

Jennifer James, Undersecretary for Workforce Development, provided an overview of the MassHire *Road to Re-Employment* – the initiative to ensure MassHire is an effective system for moving people from job loss to job gain in a COVID-19 era. With Massachusetts experiencing record unemployment, the Road to Re-Employment objective is to make targeted investments in technology and operations to streamline the customer’s virtual experience. The strategies are to use data to conduct targeted outreach to job seekers, create interactive, virtual pathways for job seekers and businesses, meet hiring demand through mining claimant data, and ramp up training capacity to build talent pipelines for in-demand occupations. Currently the work involves building out the virtual service pathway to include automated job matching, virtual workshops, virtual job fairs, and online training options.

Janice Weekes, Director of the MassHire Central Region Career Centers, shared her perspective and experience in responding to, and navigating through the COVID-19 pandemic. Areas of challenge for her and her team include transitioning to operating remotely, reconfiguring the Career Center to meet new safety protocols and dealing with the new COVID-19 restrictions, and the discrepancies between state mandates and local/city regulations.

Rainer Gawlick and Jim Cassetta, Co-Chairs of the Adult Pathways Committee, shared that the committee will be focusing on addressing the digital divide due to concerns the committee had over increased reliance on technology negatively impacting vulnerable populations. Preliminary research is showing that the digital divide, access to equipment (computers), impacts the customer’s ability to participate in training, and those with tech need require supports to help navigate the challenges. Steve Aalto of WORK, Inc, who runs a MassHire Boston Career Center Access Point in Dorchester, affirmed that technology challenges are impacting customers. The committee will be exploring these themes further in future meetings.

**Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Joanne Pokaski called for a motion to approve the meeting minutes for the June 4, 2020 meeting minutes. The motion was made, and approved unanimously through voice and chat vote.

**Modernizing the Workforce System**

Secretary Acosta proposed the formation of a new Board committee called the “Workforce System Modernization Committee”. This committee will work to ensure Massachusetts has a world-class IT system to support a modern, efficient, and accessible workforce development system. Modernizing the workforce system is a goal in the 2020 WIOA State Plan, so it should follow there should be a committee focused on this topic. Furthermore, the legislature passed an IT Bond Bill that will fund IT infrastructure investments, including a new UI system. The IT Bond Bill also requires the formation of a new council that will provide stakeholder input in the development of the new UI system. This council will report to the MassHire State Workforce Board within the larger umbrella of workforce system modernization efforts. Other committee deliverables include consulting on development and deployment of the MassHire virtual services pathway, spanning all core workforce system services including career counseling, training and career development, job matching and searching; engaging with the UI Advisory Council on the development, implementation and deployment of an unemployment online delivery system; engaging and coordinating with appropriate stakeholders to assist with system access, visibility, and gathering feedback; and reporting to the MassHire State Workforce Board (MSWB) on Committee progress and recommendations to advance modernization efforts.

Senator Lessor thanked Secretary Acosta for EOLWD’s work in being responsive to constituent needs in the COVID-19 pandemic. He echoed that modernization is very important and cannot be emphasized enough. In the height of the COVID-19 unemployment crisis, other states’ UI systems crashed, but not Massachusetts, which underscores the need for a modern, well-run system. Senator Lessor shared his enthusiastic support of the IT Bond Bill, and for the formation of the committee.

Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante also thanks Secretary Acosta and her team. She is excited that dollars will be available to support modernization efforts, and also supports the formation of a Modernization Committee. She also led a virtual standing ovation for the DUA team, especially Mavis Smith and her team, in handling UI constituent issues. The increase in volume of UI calls to her office is unprecedented. Rep. Ferrante is looking forward to connecting the unemployment to employment opportunities in an enhanced, modern, workforce system.

Radhames Nova asked if this committee will be permanent or a task force. Secretary Acosta responded that it will be permanent given the need to stay vigilant and to make sure the system is proactively addressing the needs of the workforce system’s IT infrastructure. Jennifer Morales is supportive of this committee, stating that it is important. Pam Everhart echoed support for the committee. Her work with Fidelity Investments with over 30 million customers has proven that the work begins and ends with tech. Customers expect the Amazon experience, and we could also benefit from analyzing the data that comes from engaging with tech. Bob LePage added the importance of having the ability to feed into education, especially Adult Education. Through enhanced technology, there is the ability to target and communicate more effectively.

Joanne Pokaski called for a motion to approve the formation of a “Workforce System Modernization Committee”. The motion was made, and approved unanimously through voice and chat vote.

Ms. Pokaski adjourned the meeting at 11:19 a.m.