

MassHire Central Region Workforce Board
January 18, 2024; 8:30 AM
Via MS Teams – phone & online

Meeting Minutes

The following members/proxies were present: Paul Gilbody (Chair; Milford Federal Bank); Janice Ryan Weekes (MassHire Central Career Centers); Joshua Froimson (AbbVie); Kevin Kuros (MA Office of Business Development); Robert DeMastro (MA Small Business Development Center Network); Jack Houliker (MA Rehabilitation Commission); Robin Hooper (The Community Builders); Kathy Rentsch (Quinsigamond Community College); Michael Williams (MassHire Department of Career Services); Nicole Trombly (Grafton Job Corps Center); Joyce Clemence (MA Department of Transitional Assistance); Emily Lehman (Worcester Public Schools); Kimberly White (QCC); Rachel Monárrez (Worcester Public Schools); Amy Averback (UMass Memorial); Kevin Gaugush (Advantage Truck Group); Alex Guardiola (Greater Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce); Alyssa Hansen (MAPFRE Insurance); Richard Laferriere (CVS); Dean Messier (Imperial Distributors)

Guests/Staff: J. Turgeon (MCRWB); Elizabeth Goguen (MassHire Department of Career Services); Deb Baillargeon (MassHire Southbridge Career Center)

Call to Order, Announcement of Quorum & Note of Conflict of Interest: P. Gilbody called the meeting to order at 8:34 AM, and asked the members if anyone wished to note any conflicts of interest on the agenda. No conflicts were noted. P. Gilbody then welcomed all the attendees and thanked them for their attendance. J. Turgeon then reviewed the attendance log.

Approval of October 19, 2023 MCRWB Meeting Minutes: Upon a motion and second from the attendees, the minutes were unanimously approved.

P. Gilbody then turned the meeting facilitation over to J. Turgeon who called for nominations for Board Chair. J. Froimson nominated Paul Gilbody, and this was seconded by R. Hooper. P. Gilbody accepted the nomination. Hearing no other nominations, J. Turgeon closed the nominations and called for a vote which was unanimous. P. Gilbody thanked the Board for their vote and announced his Vice Chair is J. Froimson.

P. Gilbody then welcomed Elizabeth Goguen from the MassHire Department of Career Services who gave a presentation to the Board regarding the recent spike in refugees and the work being done at the state level to support their integration into the workforce as quickly as possible. Deb Baillargeon, who is serving as the career centers' point person for us locally also discussed the work being done in our region – which has been tasked to directly support the refugees primarily staying in two emergency shelters; Sutton and Sturbridge. It was noted that Ascentria Care Alliance and the Central MA Housing Alliance also serve immigrants and refugees at other central MA locations, including Worcester, and recently MassHire was contacted by the shelter operator in Milford. Services include work skills and interest assessments, language assessments, and previous work histories. All are in process of getting their US work authorizations if they have not already done so. Career Center staff have been performing employer outreach and have set up hiring fairs, as well as helping with career counseling and resume writing. The MCRWB also has a request in to the state for new funding to support ESOL and career technical training for these individuals. J. Turgeon then highlighted a new work-based learning

program the state is piloting that would allow refugees waiting on their work authorization paperwork to receive training at area employer worksites while receiving a state funded needs based benefit payment. Several members asked to get more information regarding the refugees and how they may connect with them, and J. Turgeon will help to facilitate this after the meeting.

J. Turgeon then discussed Board programming, including the YouthWorks year round program that will serve approximately 160 youth in Worcester, Milford and the Blackstone Valley area, as well as highlighting several other programs the Board is involved with. This includes a CDL training and a regional behavioral healthcare grant led by Open Sky. He also reminded members that the Board has been revising the regional blueprint and shared some preliminary work that has been done, including regional employment trends and new occupations that may be added to the region's priority listings. J. Turgeon stated the blueprint should be released soon for public comment before being finalized and submitted to the state. He also informed the Board that in early March the career center three year certification, combined with the annual monitoring, will be completed. This is done in partnership with state officials who also review the Board and career center operations during that time.

J. Ryan Weekes then informed the Board that the career center move in Worcester to 554 Main Street has been going well, and said the ribbon cutting was a big success, thanking those that were able to attend. She also notified the Board that most all career center staff vacancies have all been filled, including the role of Access To Recovery program coordinator. A career counselor position will soon be posted, and she is leaving another administrative position vacant as next year's career center budget may be tightening. J. Ryan Weekes then discussed programming successes, such as the enrollment of more than 170 job seekers into job training this past year – spending down our training funds as planned. She noted that other funding for training through MassHire and regional WIOA partners may still be available. She also highlighted an expansion of the highly successful Bounce work readiness program, and discussed staff training that was conducted at the Hanover Theater that was combined with a holiday luncheon. Lastly, she noted that the career center website is being revamped to be more customer friendly and easier to navigate.

J. Turgeon shared some upcoming Board and career center events that members may wish to promote or attend, and also reminded members that a list of current training programs is posted on the board's website (www.masshirecentral.com) and asked attendees to share information regarding these projects with their respective networks. These programs include medical interpreter, pharmacy technician, and carpentry training.

Several upcoming events were reviewed with members, including a regional workforce partners summit being held in partnership with the Central MA Regional Planning Commission on the afternoon of Feb. 27th.

P. Gilbody then asked members if there were any additional announcements and hearing none, thanked all for their attendance and reminded members that the next MCRWB full board meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 18, 2024 at 8:30am.

P. Gilbody then invited members to make a motion to adjourn, and after a motion, a second and unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned at 9:34am.

Respectfully drafted by, J. Turgeon; MCRWB