

WORKFORCE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION TASK FORCE

Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 2024 Interim

August 14, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The third meeting of the Workforce Attraction and Retention Task Force was held on August 14, 2024, at 1:00 PM in Room 131 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Max Wise, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Max Wise Co-Chair; Representative Robert Duvall Co-Chair; Senators Greg Elkins, Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Jason Howell, and Robin L. Webb; Representatives Josh Branscum, Matthew Koch, Michael Sarge Pollock, and Ashley Tackett Laferty.

Guests: Katia Albanese, Project Director, State Exchange on Employment & Disability; Eve Hill, Legislative and Policy Counsel, State Exchange on Employment & Disability; Whitney Choate, College and Career Coach, Hart County High School; Eric Sexton, Executive Director, Barren River Area Development District; Jennifer Kirchner, Executive Director, Kentuckians for Better Transportation; Gina Douthat, General Manager, Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky; Representative Matthew Koch, House District 72; Representative Nima Kulkarni, House District 40; Brian Becker, Vice President of Operations and Programs, South Central Workforce Development Board; Ana Sancristoful, New American Workforce Navigator, South Central Workforce Development Board; Dr. David Finke, PhD, CEO, Jewish Family and Career Services of Louisville; Kristina Mielke, Career Counselor, Refugees & Immigrants, Jewish Family and Career Services of Louisville

LRC Staff: Janine Coy, Jasmine Williams, Wendy Craig, and Sasche Allen.

Approval of July Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes from July 30, 2024 meeting was made by Representative Pollock, seconded by Representative Koch, and approved by voice vote.

Advancing Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Kentucky

The State Exchange on Employment and Disability (SEED) is an initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy with the goal of fostering a nationwide workforce more inclusive of people with disabilities. The program aims to strengthen state and local collaboration that supports organizations that represent state policymakers to respond to disability employment and workforce development requests and inquiries. Katia Albanese, Project Director for SEED, discussed various resources

Committee meeting materials may be accessed online at <https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/CommitteeDocuments/386>

offered, including Work Matters: A Framework for States on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities, and Kentucky disability population statistics. Eve Hill, Legislative and Policy Counsel for SEED, presented private sector engagement, stay-at-work and return-to-work, and state as a model employer policy options. These included options such as supporting and lessening burdens on businesses seeking to hire people with disabilities through technical assistance, education, outreach, and facilitating claiming of available tax credits, offering wellness and injury prevention programs, adopting formal mechanisms specifically focused on increasing the employment of people with disabilities, and adopting stay-at-work and return-to-work policies and practices. Ms. Albanese closed by discussing other states' employee with disabilities policies.

Chairman Wise requested that the committee members be given more information on other states' disabled employee policies. Answering a question, Ms. Albanese discussed recommendations that were a result of Work Matters: A Framework for States on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities and said some were implemented by the General Assembly. Addressing a follow up question, she estimated that statistics regarding the disabled population in the Commonwealth have remained consistent but data could be provided to verify.

Workforce Transportation Barriers Affecting Youth

Whitney Choate, College and Career Coach at Hart County High School, and Eric Sexton, Executive Director of Barren River Area Development District, discussed transportation hindrances impacting youth including access to obtaining driver licensing and photo identification. Ms. Choate discovered the impact of the barrier on students in her school district and contacted Mr. Sexton to formulate a regional strategy to address the barrier. Mr. Sexton stated the issue is an unintended consequence of changing driver licensing locations from being housed in circuit clerks' offices to regional locations. The lack of driver education and printed driver education materials was discussed. Solutions were presented including an enhanced driver education programs and online driver testing.

Addressing comments made by Chairman Wise, Mr. Sexton suggested working with the Transportation Cabinet to confirm the interpretation of the statute regarding a parent or guardian being present for driver testing.

Responding to Representative Pollock, Ms. Choate said she did not think the minimum age to obtain a drivers license was the issue. The issue lies in the barriers to obtaining a drivers license or photo identification such as transportation to regional testing and issuing sites and the lack of driver education resources.

Senator Webb commented about not supporting regional testing, nonprinted driver education materials, and the lack of driver education in school due to the hardships placed

on rural, elderly, and young populations.

Answering a question from Chairman Duvall, Mr. Sexton discussed his suggestion of an enhanced driver education program that could utilize individuals who have a background in driver education or related field.

Representative Koch suggested employees of the regional centers administering driver testing at high schools.

Senator Funke Frommeyer thanked the speakers for presenting such an important issue and acknowledged the negative impact of regional testing offices voiced by constituents.

The Role of Public Transit in Workforce Participation

Jennifer Kirchner, Executive Director of Kentuckians for Better Transportation, and Gina Douthat, General Manager of Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky, jointly presented on transportation as an overall workforce barrier and ways public transit may be a solution. Kentuckians for Better Transportation educates and advocates for a safe and sustainable network that provides mobility across the Commonwealth for economic growth and improved quality of life. The organization's members include area development districts, counties, cities, public transit authorities, and many others. Federal transportation funds are administered by the Office of Transportation Delivery within the Transportation Cabinet that seeks grant funds; oversees and implements various statewide public transit grants; and coordinates nonemergency human service transportation. Ms. Douthat discussed the challenges of the state's three major urban transit operators including Lextran, Transit Authority of River City (TARC), and Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky (TANK) and overall transportation challenges with long term reliable sources of funding, rural job sites, and using public private partnerships.

Replying to Chairman Wise, Ms. Douthat stated CARES Act funding was appropriated and fused into public transit across the state; however, those funds will likely be depleted in 2025. Ms. Kirchner discussed some limits to federal funding.

Addressing Representative Pollock, Ms. Douthat said there are private employers across the Commonwealth that offer employee transportation when the public system cannot meet their needs. She discussed challenges created due to recent changes and limitations for obtaining Commercial Drivers' Licenses.

In response to Senator Funke Frommeyer, Ms. Douthat discussed innovations in transportation including smaller vehicles and micro-transit.

Employment of Historically Untapped Workforce Populations in the Commonwealth

Representative Matthew Koch; Representative Nima Kulkarni; Brian Becker, Vice President of Operations and Programs at South Central Workforce Development Board; Ana Sancristoful, New American Workforce Navigator, South Central Workforce Development Board; Dr. David Finke, CEO of Jewish Family and Career Services of Louisville; and Kristina Mielke, Career Counselor with Refugees & Immigrants at Jewish Family and Career Services of Louisville, discussed the untapped immigrant population that could be one solution to workforce shortages across the state. The Commonwealth has four resettlement agencies and a higher concentration of refugees in Louisville, Lexington, Bowling Green, and Owensboro. Representative Kulkarni pointed out changes to federal immigration law including the immigration parole program that does not permit immediate work authorization for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, or Venezuelans. Ms. Mielke discussed her perspective as a career counselor to immigrants and refugees and several barriers to employment for the immigrant population including language, transportation, and licensing and credentialing. Mr. Becker and Ms. Sancristoful offered testimony regarding their immigrant employment services and said employment services staff positions that can be mobile, face to face, outside traditional work hours, and have business engagement responsibilities are replicable and have been successful and requested for immigrants across the state and country.

Addressing comments and questions from Senator Webb, Ms. Mielke stated most individuals struggle with licensing and credentialing in the healthcare field. She discussed solutions to barriers and gave examples of what some other states have implemented. Representative Kulkarni added that the goal is to focus on traditionally underrepresented workforce populations and spoke about stringent licensing requirements and eliminating obstacles.

Replying to Senator Howell, Representative Kulkarni confirmed that “parole” referred to the federal immigration parole program. Addressing follow up questions, Ms. Mielke said there are mostly doctors and dentists who have immigrated to the Commonwealth that have licensing and credentialing limitations. Representative Kulkarni pointed out issues with language barriers, lack of interpreters, and lack of broadband access. Dr. Finke said a systemic approach that involves strong partnerships and cooperation from private sector partners is key.

Answering questions from Senator Funke Frommeyer, Representative Koch stated that the initiative on removing employment barriers for immigrants is an ongoing process, and Representative Kulkarni pointed out that most of the issues with immigration law are at the federal level with some states making policy changes to combat the federal challenges. Ms. Mielke discussed the importance of bilingual resources.

Responding to Senator Elkins, Representative Koch said 95 percent of the 144,000

immigrants in the Commonwealth are gainfully employed with similar statistics nationally and a higher workforce participation rate of native-born Americans.

Chairman Duvall requested additional resources regarding other states' immigration laws and solutions to immigrant employment barriers.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.