

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

Minutes of the 4th Meeting of the 2025 Interim

September 25, 2025

Call to Order and Roll Call

The fourth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Economic Development and Workforce Investment was held on September 25, 2025, at 9:00 AM in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Josh Branscum, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Josh Branscum, Co-Chair; Senator Phillip Wheeler, Co-Chair; Senators Gary Boswell, Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Rick Girdler, Jason Howell, Matt Nunn, Mike Wilson, and Max Wise; and Representatives Adam Bowling, Robert Duvall, Daniel Elliott, Al Gentry, Peyton Griffie, Kevin Jackson, Kim King, Nima Kulkarni, Matthew Lehman, Matt Lockett, and J.T. Payne.

Guests: Jeric DeVore, Executive Director, Kentucky Recovery Vocational Workforce and Re-Entry, Inc.; Mitch Barnhart, Athletics Director, University of Kentucky (UK); Josh Heird, Athletics Director, University of Louisville (UofL); Mark Hohmann, CFO, Goodwill Kentucky; Dr. Marsha Berry, Director, Excel Center; and Viviana Anderson, Student, Excel Center.

LRC Staff: Janine Coy, Austin Johnson, and Sasche Allen.

Approval of August Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes from the August 28, 2025, meeting was made by Representative Lockett, seconded by Senator Boswell, and approved by voice vote.

Kentucky Recovery Vocational: Workforce Reimagined

Jeric DeVore, Executive Director, Kentucky Recovery Vocational Workforce and Re-Entry, Inc., provided a comprehensive overview of the organization's model for assisting individuals in recovery and those re-entering the workforce following incarceration in collaboration with the Sobriety Peace Awareness Recovery Center (SPARC). The program has a holistic approach that integrates vocational training, industry-recognized credentialing, and career coaching with individualized recovery services, ensuring participants are prepared for both entry-level and more advanced roles in sectors experiencing labor shortages. He highlighted performance metrics demonstrating program

success, including placement rates for participants. He stressed the program's potential to expand the state's labor force by engaging individuals traditionally excluded from mainstream workforce initiatives, while simultaneously supporting public safety and community reintegration objectives.

In response to Co-Chair Wheeler, Mr. DeVore confirmed the program utilized funds from an opioid abatement grant to launch its pilot program and has most recently been operating with donor contributions, including contributions from SPARC. The organization will be seeking additional opioid abatement grant funding and scaling the program across the state. Addressing a follow up question, he verified soft skills training is part of the program's curriculum.

In response to Senator Howell, Mr. Devore explained that no mechanisms are currently in place to track the employment progression of individuals who have completed the program and entered the workforce. However, he noted participants may continue receiving program services and support for up to 90 days following completion.

In response to Senator Boswell, Mr. DeVore said the cost per program participant is approximately \$2000.

Update on College Athletics and 2025 RS SB 3

Mitch Barnhart, Athletics Director, UK, and Josh Heird, Athletics Director, UofL, provided an update on college athletics and related provisions in 2025 RS SB 3. They outlined the current landscape of collegiate athletics governance, emphasizing evolving national standards around name, image, and likeness (NIL) agreements and student-athlete compensation. They discussed how the legislation interacts with institutional policies, athletic department budgets, and compliance responsibilities, including administration of NIL contracts, reporting requirements, and team roster limitations. Strategies for leveraging athletics to support institutional priorities, such as student retention and academic success were also highlighted.

In response to Representative Lehman, the athletics directors discussed the relationship between evolving NIL policies and ongoing conference realignments, noting that scheduling adjustments have been necessary, but historical matchups have been preserved as much as possible.

In response to Senator Girdler, Mr. Heird addressed recent developments in relation to UofL's 2013 NCAA Men's Basketball Championship being vacated by the NCAA.

In response to Representative Jackson, the athletics directors discussed revenue sharing and recent changes to the NCAA Transfer Portal. They noted that adjustments to the

frequency of transfers were necessary and finding a balanced process is crucial. Representative Jackson commented on the impact of college athletics on high school programs across the state.

In response to Senator Wise's remarks on the federal Student Compensation and Opportunity through Rights and Endorsements (SCORE) Act, Mr. Heird stated he does not support creating competitive advantages through state legislation. He favors federal legislation to standardize the process nationwide and emphasized that student-athletes should not be considered employees. Mr. Barnhart added that the SCORE Act provides a pathway forward. The SCORE Act would preempt state laws, codify that student-athletes are not employees, and promote financial literacy and generational opportunity for student-athletes. Both athletics directors noted that the U.S. college athletics system is unique compared to other countries.

In response to Representative Gentry's inquiry regarding challenges surrounding non-revenue sports as it pertains to Title IX, the athletics directors stressed the importance of a broad-based athletics program that balances revenue producing and non-revenue producing sports. Representative Gentry made additional remarks about the increase in adaptive golf programs at institutions across the country.

In response to Senator Boswell, Mr. Barnhart discussed sporting event attendance, alignment of programs, and athlete retention.

In response to Senator Howell, the athletics directors discussed the financial literacy of collegiate athletes and their families.

Goodwill Kentucky Excel Center

Mark Hohmann, CFO, Goodwill Kentucky; Dr. Marsha Berry, Director, Excel Center; and Viviana Anderson, Student, Excel Center, presented on the Excel Center, a tuition-free high school program for adults operated by Goodwill. The Excel Center started in 2010 in Indiana and has since expanded to 12 states. The program removes barriers to education by offering wraparound supports such as free childcare, flexible scheduling, life coaching, and career planning. Research shows graduates of the Excel Center model experience substantial long-term earnings growth and improved employment outcomes. Ms. Anderson shared her experience as a student and as the first person in her family to obtain a high school diploma, emphasizing the program's role in providing educational attainment and economic mobility. Dr. Berry highlighted that year to date, there have been 76 graduates of the program with 100 percent of graduates earning industry certifications or dual college credits. All graduates completed employment readiness training that includes topics such as digital literacy, soft skills, resume writing, and mock interviewing. During the 2024 Regular Session, the General Assembly appropriated \$2 million in each fiscal year for

the Excel Center's operations with the actual direct costs of each fiscal year totaling \$2.3 million. In order to expand to more communities, the Excel Center would require an estimated \$5.4 million in each fiscal year with a one-time appropriation of approximately \$3 million to upfit a second location.

In response to Senator Boswell, Dr. Berry offered to provide further research regarding the barriers to obtaining a high school diploma. The Excel Center serves individuals over the age of 18, with the average age of 31 to 32 years and a median age of 29 years. Ms. Anderson added that traditionally not all individuals have encouragement or the support to earn a high school diploma.

In response to Senator Funke Frommeyer, Dr. Berry confirmed Northern Kentucky is outside the service area of Goodwill Kentucky. The organization has a partnership with Kentucky Community and Technical College System.

In response to Representative King's inquiry regarding the citizenship of students, Dr. Berry stated prospective students are required to present state issued identification and proof of residency.

In response to Senator Wilson, Dr. Berry detailed community outreach and wellness events held across the state, utilization of social media and online platforms, and partnerships with state agencies.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 10:33 AM.