



# MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

## Quarterly Meeting Minutes

**Tuesday, January 27, 2026**

**7:30 a.m.**

**Via Zoom**

**Meeting ID: 865 3442 3399**

**Passcode: 082661**

### **MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Dawn Beati, Kemelin Domenech, Andrew Herlihy, Billy Lang, Carol Riemer, Frank Surillo, Nardy Vega, Ellen Weinhold, Juan Yepez

### **MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Frank Amato, Michael Bevilacqua, John Bruno, Wilson DeLos Santos, Lane Glenn, Conor Helfrich, John Lavoie, Maureen Lynch, Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, Eric Nyandat, Cal Williams

### **STAFF PRESENT:**

Frank Bonet, Lynda Buote, Varsha Gandhi, Cristy Gomez, Yeang Leng, Cecelia Lunde, Valerie Luque, Tracy Myszkowski, Corina Ossers, Abby Seripais

### **GUESTS PRESENT:**

Esther Albuquerque, Alicia Appugliese, Juan Belliard, Eric Nelson

#### **I. Call to Order**

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 7:36 a.m.

#### **II. Welcome and Introductions**

Chairman Yepez said welcome and thank you for attending today's quarterly meeting.

#### **III. Approval of the October 28, 2025, Annual Meeting minutes (vote required)**

Chairman Yepez called for a motion to approve the minutes of the October 28, 2025, Annual Meeting.

**Motion made by Ellen Weinhold, seconded by Nardy Vega to approve the minutes of the October 28, 2025, Annual Meeting. Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **IV. Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – MMVWB Nominations of Eric Nyandat, Conor Helfrich, and Frank Surillo – 3.3.25 (vote required)**

Frank Bonet said these next few agenda items are to ratify prior electronic board votes.

Chairman Yepez called for the Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – MMVWB Nominations of Eric Nyandat, Conor Helfrich, and Frank Surillo – 3.3.25.

**Motion made by Frank Surillo, seconded by Billy Lang to the Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – MMVWB Nominations of Eric Nyandat, Conor Helfrich, and Frank Surillo – 3.3.25. Motion passed unanimously.**

**V. Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – Approval to Award to Fund WIOA Youth RFP to Fund CyberWarrior, LARE Institute/American Training Inc., and Haverhill YMCA and Not to Fund The Barber Academy – 6.13.24 (vote required)**

Chairman Yepez called for a motion for the Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – Approval to Award to Fund WIOA Youth RFP to Fund Cyberwarrior, LARE Institute/American Training Inc., and Haverhill YMCA and Not to Fund The Barber Academy – 6.13.24.

**Motion made by Frank Surillo, seconded by Billy Lang to the Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote - Approval to Award to Fund WIOA Youth RFP to Fund CyberWarrior, LARE Institute/American Training Inc., and Haverhill YMCA and Not to Fund The Barber Academy 6.13.24. Motion passed unanimously.**

**VI. Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – MMVWB Board Officers and Planning/Career Center Committee Appointments: Wilson DeLos Santos, Vilma Martinez-Domiguez, and Billy Lang – 8.18.23 (vote required)**

Chairman Yepez called for a motion for the Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – MMVWB Board Officers and Planning/Career Center Committee Appointments: Wilson DeLios Santos, Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, Billy Lang - 8.18.23.

**Motion made by Frank Surillo, seconded by Billy Lang to the Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – MMVWB Board Officers and Planning/Career Center Committee Appointments: Wilson DeLos Santos, Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, and Billy Lang – 8.18.23. Motion passed unanimously.**

**VII. Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – Approval of MMVWB Policy Update – One-the-Job Training (OJT) Policy and Approval to Transfer \$70,000 of WIOA Dislocated Worker Training Funds to WIOA Adult Training Funds – 3.23.23 (vote required)**

Chairman Yepez called for a motion for the Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – Approval of MMVWB Policy Update – On-the-Job Training (OJT) Policy and Approval to Transfer \$70,000 of WIOA Dislocated Worker Training Funds to WIOA Adult Training Funds – 3.23.23.

**Motion made by Frank Surillo, seconded by Billy Lang to the Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – Approval of MMVWB Policy Update – On-the-Job Training (OJT) Policy and Approval to Transfer \$70,000 of WIOA Dislocated Worker Training Funds to WIOA Adult Training Funds – 3.23.23. Motion passed unanimously.**

**VIII. Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – Approval of MMVWB Policy Updates – MMVWB Support Services Policy, MMVWB Needs Related Policy and MMVWB Individual Training Account (ITA) Policy – 2.24.23 (vote required)**

Chairman Yepez called for a motion for the Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – Approval of MMVWB Policy Updates – MMVWB Support Services Policy, MMVWB Needs Related Policy, and MMVWB Individual Training Account (ITA) Policy – 2.24.23.

**Motion made by Frank Surillo, seconded by Billy Lang to the Ratification of Prior Electronic Vote – Approval of MMVWB Policy Updates – MMVWB Support Services Policy, MMVWB Needs Related Policy, and MMVWB Individual Training Account (ITA) Policy – 2.24.23. Motion passed unanimously.**

**IX. Report of Chair**

Chairman Yepez said good morning, everyone. Thank you for attending the inaugural meeting of the calendar year 2026. I trust that your holidays and year-end celebrations were enjoyable.

I have a brief report to share today, but first in accordance with rules of order, this meeting of the Merrimack Valley Workforce Board is being recorded solely for the purpose of preparing the official meeting minutes. The recording will not be used for any other purpose, will not be distributed, and will be retained only as long as necessary to complete the minutes.

As always, it’s a pleasure to convey positive news from DC. On January 20th, Congressional Appropriators reached an agreement to fund WIOA and workforce development programs for FY26. Fortunately, this agreement reflects the earlier Senate proposals - maintaining level funding from FY24 (though with a \$10 million reduction in Adult spending, as anticipated).

Once this is passed (with a vote expected this week), the concerns regarding significant cuts or block grants (as suggested by President Trump & the House last Fall) are alleviated for the time being.

Moreover, the appropriations bill mandates that DOE and DOL provide biweekly reports to Congress regarding the attempted transfer of programs and funds from DOE to DOL. The language in the bill explicitly states that DOE lacks the authority to shift these programs, funds, and responsibilities to other agencies.

Once the House votes on this, which as of this report was January 22 (but has until January 30), it will be the Senate's responsibility to approve or consider any changes.

On a more positive note, as many of you are already aware from the board’s newsletter and photos, I am thrilled to announce that the Merrimack Valley Career Center Team has been recognized as the runner-up in the Business Collaboration category at the MassHire Awards of the Commonwealth. This esteemed award was celebrated with all the fanfare of an award ceremony, attended by state representatives and senators at the state house in Boston. Congratulations to the team!

This concludes my report. Thank you.

**X. Reports of Committee Chairs**

**i. Planning and Career Center Committee**

Frank Bonet read today’s Planning and Career Center Committee report. He said the following is a summary of program activity and performance outcomes for the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2026 (as of December 31, 2025). The data reflects progress toward the goals established in the FY26 Annual Plan and is based on MOSES and Crystal reporting systems.

- **Total Job Seekers Served:** 3698 (42% of annual goal of 8,800), an increase of 20% since our last meeting
  - **Unemployed Individuals:** 3397 (41%), in increase of 20% since our last meeting
  - **Persons with Disabilities:** 388 (88%), an increase of 40%
  - **UI Claimants:** 6112 (42%), an increase of 22%
  - **Veterans:** 213 (35%), an increase of 15%
- Engagement with people with disabilities is notably strong, reflecting improved outreach and accessibility efforts.
- **Total Employers Served:** 1309 (63%), an increase of 16%
  - **New Employers:** 519 (39%), an increase of 20%
  - **Repeat Employers:** 790 (79%), an increase of 14%
- **Employers Receiving Job Seeker Referrals:** 69 (79%), an increase of 40%
- **Employers Hiring from Referrals:** 19 (42%), an increase of 16%
- **Employers Receiving Enhanced Services:** 163
- Employer engagement continues to be a program strength, with more than half of the annual goal already achieved in the first quarter.
- **WIOA Program Performance**
  - **Adult Program**
    - Participants: 67% of the goal
    - In Training: 68% of the goal
    - Program Exiters: 16% of the goal
  - **Dislocated Worker Program**
    - Participants: 63% of the goal
    - In Training: 56% of the goal
    - Program Exiters: 35% of the goal
  - **Youth Program**
    - Participants: 55% of the goal
    - Training Activities: 63% of the combined goal between OST, I&O of school), Work experience ITA & Group)
    - Program Exiters: 25%
- Participant enrollment and training progress are consistent with prior year trends. Employment outcomes and wage measures will be realized in subsequent quarters as individuals complete their training.
- **Key Takeaways**
  - **Overall performance is on track**, particularly in employer engagement and service delivery for persons with disabilities.
  - **Employment placements and wage outcomes** will increase in later quarters as training complete programs.
  - **Focus areas for Q3–Q4:** increasing youth engagement and supporting participants toward completion and placement.

This concludes my report. Thank you.

## ii. Youth Committee

In the absence of Cal Williams, Cecelia Lunde said I hope everyone is well. On behalf of Cal Williams, our Youth Committee Chair, I am pleased to share the following youth programs highlights.

Through our Connecting Activities work, the team continues to provide career development education services to students from our area high schools. We continue to expand meaningful career and post-secondary exposure opportunities for students across the region. In partnership with the GEAR UP program (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) we support students in building high expectations, staying engaged in school, and preparing for college, trade school, trainings, and career pathways. This fall, our Youth Services Specialists attended the GEAR UP Fair at Lawrence High School, with over 150 students present. This event reinforces our shared commitment to student readiness and success.

Students from Amesbury Innovation High School and Triton Regional High School participated in an enriching visit to North Shore Community College, where they explored transfer pathways to Salem State University, learned about campus living options, and toured state-of-the-art healthcare labs. These visits provided firsthand insight into hands-on, career-focused programming, and the many post-secondary options available to them.

In collaboration with the Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (NAMC), the Advanced Manufacturing Career Exploration cohort students from Lawrence High School attended an open house at Shea Concrete in Amesbury, MA and gained exposure to real-world manufacturing environments. Prior to the open house the team facilitated a preparatory workshop. This workshop focused on supporting students preparing for employment via the RIASEC model and how personality traits connect to career paths.

We also supported NAMC's Mock Interview event at Lawrence High School, where students practiced professional interview skills with representatives from 10 employer partners, including Raytheon, Shea Concrete, American Training, and MassHire North Shore. We extend our sincere thanks to the NAMC team for their continued partnership in creating impactful, hands-on experiences that connect students to the Advanced Manufacturing field.

The team have referred a total of 177 youth to our YouthWorks Cycle 2 Year-Round Experience program. We have already met 85% of enrollment goal for this cycle. Our outstanding employer partners are providing youth with mentoring, guidance, and supervision while placed at their hosts and worksites. These great opportunities are making a difference in our youth lives.

As of December 31, 2025, our current WIOA Youth program enrollment is 60 participants out of the 109 goal. This represents 55% of goal. New enrollments total 41 participants out of the 86 goal. The MassHire MV Career Center team has referred nine participants to Individual Training Accounts, 17% of the 52 ITA goal. We have enrolled 27 out of the 34 students into the WIOA In School Youth Group Haverhill Public Schools Program. These students are participating in 15 hours of career readiness workshops prior to starting their 100 hours internships. In addition, they will attain OSHA 10 certification.

We are committed to supporting our area youth attain academic success, skills training, employment readiness and placement by providing youth with the tools they need to succeed in school and the workforce. Our programs reinforce academic achievement through guidance and support, offer project-based learning, hands-on training and career exploration opportunities to build practical skills, and prepare youth for employment by developing professionalism, work ethic, and leadership. Through mentorship and real-world experiences. We are thankful for

working together with our youth servicing organizations, school districts, and employers to assist youth set goals, gain confidence, and transition successfully into higher education, training programs, or meaningful employment.

This concludes the youth committee report.

**iii. Nominating Committee**

**a. Board Nomination: Victor L. Betances (vote required)**

Billy Lang said welcome. I trust that your end of 2025 was enjoyable.

I am pleased to nominate Victor L. Betances for membership on the Merrimack Valley Workforce Board. Mr. Betances brings more than twenty years of leadership, management, and training experience across public service, workforce supervision, and entrepreneurship. He is the owner of two upscale businesses employing approximately twenty-five full- and part-time staff, and he is currently embarking on the development of a major distribution operations company, further demonstrating his commitment to regional economic growth and job creation.

Mr. Betances previously served the City of Lawrence as Assistant Commissioner of Health and Code Services, where he oversaw regulatory compliance, operations, and interdepartmental coordination. He is bilingual in English and Spanish and brings a strong understanding of employer needs, talent development, and workforce equity. His combined experience as a public servant and growing business leader makes him a strong asset to the Merrimack Valley Workforce Board. He is a constant supporter of our youth as his company places youth from our CommCorp grants to work in his businesses, and I respectfully submit his nomination for your consideration and vote. His resume is attached for your review.

This concludes my report. Thank you.

Chairman Yopez called for a motion to nominate Victor L. Betances for MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board membership.

**Motion made by Frank Surillo, seconded by Nardy Vega to nominate Victor L. Betances for MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board membership. Motion passed unanimously.**

**iv. Finance Report**

Frank Bonet said welcome. I trust that your end of 2025 was enjoyable.

As of our first quarter ending December 31, 2025, the MHMVWB expenditures were \$1,135,907 (31.73%), GLCAC \$657,128 plus \$176,458 (34.83%) in accruals, and DCS \$663,507 (41.45).

Youth Wages, Stipends, and Supportive Services total \$663.636 through the first half of the fiscal year, and we have accrued \$306,068 in other areas, such as WIOA and Non-WIOA, Individual and Group, Trainings. As of December 31st, we have expended and accrued close to 36.69% of the annual budget.

Available Grant Funding balances: \$2.3 million for FY26 grants and \$4.2 million for multiple grant years.

Fiscal Year 2026 Highlights - As of December 31, 2025:

- Decreased funding for MassAbility in the amount of \$5,867.83. MMVWB portion \$293.00. GLCAC portion \$5,574.83
- Decreased Funding for Career Pathways MMVWB portion in the amount of \$2,615.88.
- Increased Funding for DVOP DCS portion in the amount of \$12,262.00.
- Decreased Funding for Adult Community Learning Services in the amount of \$1,961.92. MMVWB portion \$98.00. GLCAC portion \$1,863.92.
- Increased Funding for DTA Work Program in the amount of \$16,990. MMVWB portion \$425.00. GLCAC Portion \$8,070.00. DCS Portion \$8,495.00.

Frank said this concludes with the budget summary unless there are any questions and there were none.

**XI. Report of the Executive Director**

Frank Bonet said as the chair mentioned earlier in his report, as of late Thursday, January 22, 2026, the U.S. House of Representatives was in the process of attempting to pass the final four of twelve annual appropriations bills to fund the government, with action expected to move to the Senate before a January 30, 2026, shutdown deadline.

**Status:** The House Rules Committee reconvened Thursday morning to advance the funding measures after facing delays on Wednesday due to conservative opposition, according to reports from CBS News.

**The Goal:** The House aims to pass a \$1.2 trillion package that includes funding for the Department of Homeland Security, Defense, and other agencies.

**Challenges:** The process has been complicated by debate over the Department of Homeland Security funding and its impact on immigration policies.

The FY26 conference agreement largely adopts the Senate’s approach to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and related workforce funding, rejecting the House’s proposed eliminations and deep cuts. Core programs—including WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth, Wagner-Peyser, Job Corps, Adult Education, and Senior Community Service Employment—are fully restored at or near Senate levels, preserving the federal workforce infrastructure. While a few areas see modest reductions from the Senate proposal, such as combined Career and Technical Education/Adult Education and Vocational Rehabilitation, overall funding remains stable and signals strong bipartisan support for maintaining workforce, training, and reemployment services critical to states, local boards, and employers.

Both our fiscal and programming audits have been completed by the commonwealth, and we should have a report for the Planning Committee and the full board soon.

Additionally, there is an RFP that we will be applying for - Climate-Critical Workforce Training, Equipment & Infrastructure Grants, through MassCEC. One is in Career Pathway Training Leading to Employment in Climate-Critical Priority Occupations, and the other (or a combination) Equipment Infrastructure and Training Ecosystem Support.

On December 16th, I was invited by EOLWD to highlight the impact of the Career Technical Initiative. While GLTS is a recipient of both WCTF and CTI grant funding, this event celebrated 5 years of CTI. We

had a chance to tour their CTI programming and hold a roundtable with leadership to discuss how the training has supported workforce growth and economic development in the region.  
This concludes my report.

**XII. Other Business**

Juan asked if there was any other business and there was none.

**XIII. Adjournment (vote required)**

Having no further business, Chairman Yopez called for a motion to adjourn.

**Motion made by Frank Surillo to adjourn, seconded by Dawn Beati. Motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Lynda Buote*

Recorder