



MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, April 22, 2025

7:30 a.m.

One Union Street, Suite 202

Lawrence, MA 01840

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Frank Amato, Dawn Beati, Wilson DeLos Santos, Andrew Herlihy, Billy Lang, John Lavoie, Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, Eric Nyandat, Cal Williams, Juan Yepez

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Joe Bevilacqua, John Bruno, Kemelin Domenech, Conor Helfrich, Lane Glenn, Maureen Lynch, Carol Riemer, Frank Surillo, Nardy Vega, Ellen Weinhold

STAFF PRESENT:

Lynda Buote, Varsha Gandhi, Cristy Gomez, Yeang Leng, Valerie Luque, Tracy Myszowski, Corina Ossers, Matt Robert, Abby Seripais

GUESTS PRESENT:

James Henderson, Mariah Germosen, Eric Nelson,

I. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 7:41 a.m.

II. Welcome and Introductions

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

III. Approval of the January 28, 2025, Quarterly Meeting minutes (vote required)

Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the January 28, 2025, Quarterly Meeting.

Motion made by Cal Williams, seconded by Wilson DeLos Santos to approve the minutes of the January 28, 2025, Quarterly Meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. Report of Chair

Chairman Yepez said good morning. First, I would like to welcome three new board members to the MassHire MVWB. The nominating committee submitted three names; those names were sent to you via an electronic vote and were approved by the CEO. Help me welcome:

- Conor Helfrich – Vice President of Business Operations of Helfrich Brothers Boiler Works, Inc.

- Eric Nyandat - Director of Operations of Lifecare Ambulance LLC
- Frank Surillo – Economic Director of the City of Lawrence, and Council member of the Methuen City Council

Conor and Frank were not able to attend today's meeting.

250 years ago, the shot heard from around the world began the battles of Lexington and Concord kicking off the American Revolution right here in Massachusetts. As we commemorate this 250th anniversary and the nation's independence next year, the Healey-Driscoll Administration is teaming up with partners across the Commonwealth to celebrate and engage communities. From expanded apprenticeship programs to innovative technologies to build future talent, the MVWB partners and members demonstrate bold innovation that they want to highlight and celebrate. I am excited to share that Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development will launch a statewide tour in collaboration with regional boards to celebrate the "revolution" of innovative workforce strategies across the 16 MassHire regions. This tour will serve as an opportunity to showcase the impactful and innovative solutions led by regional workforce board and/or in partnership with others in your region that helps to attract, retain, and/or develop our workforce, support existing workers, and/or engages employers to meet industry workforce needs in communities across Massachusetts. The tour kicked off in the Berkshires this week of April 14th (right before Patriot's Day) and will visit all regions for amazing events ideally by the end of June (a week before the 4th of July) to highlight the revolutionary spirit and creativity in advancing our workforce.

To that end, EOLWD has invited us to showcase the unique leadership, partnerships, and workforce solutions in your respective regions. Helfrich Brothers Boiler Works has been chosen by the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to represent the MVWB during Governor Healey's commemoration of the 250th Anniversary of the Industrial Revolution. The dates for Secretary Lauren Jones' visit are yet to be finalized. We will inform board members of the dates and location should they wish to participate.

This is an opportunity to celebrate this partnership and lean into the history of boiler manufacturing in the region and the importance of its welding workforce, especially in positioning Massachusetts at the forefront of the industrial revolution by powering the early mills, railroads, and factories that shaped the economy. And today, we are investing in workforce development programs that will continue to bolster this thriving industry.

As previously communicated by Frank in a previous email and again at our last meeting, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was not reauthorized when Congress passed the stopgap funding bill in December 2024, and once again in March 2025. It remains unclear that the 119th Congress will address WIOA funding in September 2025. This uncertainty places our workforce system at a pivotal moment as we consider future strategies.

In our last meeting I notified the board members that the Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (NAMC) was in the process of selecting a new Executive Director and that I would share with you the name of the person once employment contract negotiation was finalized. An offer was made and accepted, and I am pleased to share that Tedi Markham is now the Senior Director of the Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (NAMC). As you know, Frank serves on the NAMC board as an ex-officio member of the MVWB.

Finally, the Workforce Board concluded the FY25 Program Monitoring of the Merrimack Valley Career Center and the Commonwealth's Department of Career Services concluded the monitoring of the Workforce Board. The outcome of both monitoring's will be presented to the Planning/Career Center Committee and then to the board in our next meeting.

This concludes my report.

V. Reports of Committee Chairs

i. Planning and Career Center Committee

Abby Seripais said good morning. The procurement for the FY26 WIOA Youth Group Program was released to the public and proposals are due May 13, 2025, at 11am. A bidders' conference was held on April 8th, and we are hoping to receive various proposals. Additional information will be provided to the board once the review team meets and submits funding recommendations.

Commonwealth Corporation has revealed a proposed procedural modification for the CTI programming, expected to commence around autumn. Following the conclusion of ARPA funding, the goal is to enable local vocational schools to allocate subcontract funds to Career Centers and other potential partners through incentive-based payments, which are not guaranteed. I recommend that the Board consider the likelihood that these funds may not be adequate to support even a single UpSkill Navigator position.

As of February 28, 2025, the board, in collaboration with the Career Center and MDCS, has achieved 79% of its target for assisting job seekers (an increase of 13% from December's rate percentage), having supported 6,216 individuals out of a goal of 7,846. Most of these individuals are unemployed job seekers and unemployment claimants, numbering 5,721 (+1,141) and 4,287 (+886), respectively.

Furthermore, 70% of employers have been engaged, with a target of serving 1,450 by June 2025; currently, we have reached 1,014, which represents 70% (+8%) of the plan's objective.

The participation rate for WIOA Adult participants stands at 66% (+8%) as of February 28, 2025. The average wage placement for these participants increased by \$1.02, from \$19.94 to \$20.96 per hour, currently exceeding our expectations by 10%.

The WIOA Dislocated Worker category is experiencing significant growth. As of February 28, 2025, we have surpassed the board's goal and stand at 113% of our total participants, with four months left in FY25 budget. Notably, at least 39 of these participants are new, which accounts for 111% of the board's planned services. The average hourly wage placement for WIOA Dislocated Workers is \$55.32, representing 277% of the planned target, with an unexpected increase of \$25.32. However, this category also shows the highest program exit rate among all WIOA categories, at 244% (9 planned and 22 exits).

WIOA Youth participation is progressing steadily, currently at 47% (+3%) of the plan, with 40% being new participants.

In terms of customer demographics, there is a nearly even distribution between males and females (3,074 to 3,104, respectively). The predominant age group served is between 22 and 45 years old (3,007), followed by those aged 55 and over, totaling 1,732. Most individuals served

possess a high school diploma or education above the HS/GED. 667 individuals had less than a HS/GED.

Encouragingly, 51% of the clients projected to gain employment have successfully entered the workforce, and the total hourly wages across all groups stand at \$40.49.

This concludes my report. Thank you.

ii. Youth Committee

Cal Williams said The YouthWorks Year-Round program has successfully ended and met the enrollment goal by 100% - with a total of 131 participants across all tiers. Throughout this cycle, our team ensured that the program provided valuable experiences for all enrolled participants. We partnered with 20 employers with some facilitating programming across multiple tiers.

Our Workforce Connections event hosted in March was a great success, bringing together over 45 employer partners who provided positive feedback. Additionally, at least six WIOA partners expressed interest in further collaboration. We offered the Driver's Education Program, facilitated through Berkeley Auto School to 11 students who completed the classroom portion of the program. They are now in the process of scheduling their driving hours and road tests.

We have been actively engaged in outreach efforts, recently visiting potential work sites and organizations for programming, and most recently we visited the Newburyport Chamber of Commerce to present on YouthWorks and other workforce development initiatives.

We have implemented CommCorp's pilot Learning Management System (LMS) to better guide our participants through Signal Success, ensuring they gain critical workforce readiness skills.

The application link for the 2025 YouthWorks Summer Program opened on April 1st, with a deadline to apply by April 11th. Applicants will have until May 2nd to submit required eligibility documentation and deem eligible.

Regarding our WIOA Out of School Youth Group Programs, the CyberWarrior Foundation Program has been moving forward, with the 10 enrolled participants completing the training portion of the program. Students are now in the process of securing 100-hour internships, and to support this, the program recently hosted a job fair to connect students with potential employers. As a result of this effort, two youth have already started their internships. The program team is working on placing the remaining eight.

At the Haverhill YMCA of North Shore, WIOA In School Youth program, there are nine youth enrolled, achieving a 90% enrollment rate. These participants are actively completing additional program elements.

Eight out of nine participants completed the Bridge Program that consists of weekly workshops designed to enhance their workforce readiness, career development, and life skills.

We have released the FY'25 RFP for WIOA Youth Services – WIOA In School and Out of School Youth posted on our website: www.masshiremvw.org. We hosted a well-attended bidder's conference on Wednesday, April 9th, 2025. Proposals are due by 11:00 AM on Tuesday, May 13th, 2025.

This quarter, our youth services specialists continue to facilitate Connecting Activities and supported MyCAP implementation at some of our local high schools, where we sponsored engaging career-related activities. They also provide individualized professional development support. Youth Service Specialists have continued employer partners outreach efforts by attending Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce's network events.

In addition to MyCAP initiatives, we have been actively involved in career and college readiness events. We're also facilitating career readiness weekly workshops.

Also, we organized a company tour to Magellan Aerospace where students had the opportunity to explore careers in advanced manufacturing and aerospace technology. This hands-on experience provided them with insight into an exciting and evolving industry.

In closing, I'd like to give a shout out to our youth services specialists and our MMVWB staff and congratulations on a job well done. They continue to keep everyone on pace as the youth are 100% of our future and failure is not an option.

Unless there are questions, that concludes my report.

iii. Nominating Committee

Billy Lang said welcome. I hope everyone is having a great Spring and has enjoyed the holiday weekend as well. This board is predominantly comprised of business leaders, with a significant majority of its members hailing from the business sector. The CEO has requested that the board assess potential nominees and submit the chosen candidate for his approval. The responsibility for selecting businesses rests with this board, providing a valuable opportunity to recommend a nominee.

So, I thank you for making it possible to vote for our three new members on the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board. Welcome, Eric, Connor, and Frank.

We are currently lacking a few members to achieve a 51% representation of private business members on this board. Therefore, I kindly request that you seek out, provide, or suggest names of private businesses from the Merrimack Valley for nomination to this board. I recommend reviewing the workforce's initiatives, strategies, or plans to determine which members would be most suitable for this board. The CEO desires that the board members represent businesses that align with our mission and reflect on the members we choose to include.

We also seek a nomination for the Board Treasurer and Vice Chair.

Today, we are putting Frank Amato's name for nomination to the Planning/Career Center Committee. I would like to present this as a motion through the Chair.

Furthermore, the nominating committee requests a motion to appoint Frank Surillo as the Chair of the Planning/Career Center Committee, succeeding Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, who resigned from her role due to her organization being awarded the operation of the Merrimack Valley One-Stop Career Center.

This concludes my report. Thank you.

Chairman Yepez asked for a motion to nominate Frank Surillo as Chair of the Planning/Career Center Committee and Frank Amato as member of the Planning/Career Center Committee.

Motion made by Cal Williams, seconded by Wilson DeLos Santos to nominate Frank Surillo for MMVWB Planning/Career Center Committee Chair and Frank Amato for MMVWB Planning/Career Center Member. Motion passed unanimously.

John Lavoie said what are the responsibilities of the Planning/Career Center Committee and Corina said the Planning/Career Center Committee is responsible for approving policies. Since the Board meets on a quarterly basis, there are some policies and budgets that need to happen before the Board meetings and the Planning/Career Center Committee has the power to act on behalf of the Board if necessary. They meet monthly to review performance of the Career Center and if there is anything that needs the attention of the Board, the Committee refers to the Board. The Committee also recommends funding for procurements to the Board.

John said how is a person nominated for this committee and Corina said through the MMVWB Nominating Committee. You can speak to the Clerk, Frank or the Chair. Chairman Yepez asked if he is interested in participating and John said yes, and Juan said we can discuss.

Juan said with that, welcome Frank Surillo to the Planning/Career Center Committee Chair position and welcome Frank Amato to the Planning/Career Center Committee.

Billy said this concludes my report. Congratulations.

iv. Finance Report

Tracy Myszkowski said welcome. The essential points regarding the board's quarterly reports are outlined below:

- As of March 31, 2025, the investment of FY25 WIOA Funds in training totals \$624,433.
- The investment of FY25 Non-WIOA Funds in training as of March 31, 2025, is \$203,965.
- By March 31, 2025, the board utilized 45.85% of its total budget, while NECC has utilized 61.11%, and through February, DCS has utilized 55.06% of their respective budgets.
- The total expenditure on Customer Training amounts to 54.28% of the budget, resulting in a remaining balance of \$1,321,388. Much of this expenditure has been allocated to Youth Wages & Stipends (\$721,194) and WIOA Individual & Group Training (\$624,443).
- Procurement for WIOA Youth Group Training went out in March 2025 with total projected available funding in the amount of \$550,000. A bidder's conference was held on April 9, 2025. The deadline for proposal is May 13, 2025. The deadline for any questions related to the procurement, from interested parties, is April 30, 2025, by 11:00AM.

This concludes with the budget summary. Thank you. If there are no further questions, this will wrap up my report.

VI. MMVWB WIOA Youth Payment Policy Update (vote required)

Corina provided the Updates to the Youth Payment Policy below.

**MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board
Updates to the MMVWB Youth Payment Policy
Presented to the Board of Directors for
Review and Approval on April 22, 2025**

MMVWB Youth Payment Policy:

1. Add language regarding new ITA incentive payments and stipend payments, payment guidelines and payment procedure.

New language:

The MMVWB Youth Payment Policy will support both In School Youth and Out of School Youth enrolled in MMVWB WIOA Youth Group Programs as well as WIOA Out-of-School Youth Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).

WIOA Out-of-School Youth ITAs:

Incentive payments (ONLY for training-related activities): The MMVWB will allow incentive payments of up to \$350 per youth for training-related activities. See the incentive-payment related benchmarks below:

- ❖ \$150-completion of training
- ❖ \$200-entering training related employment (*must find and retain employment for at least 30 days within 3 months after the completion of training*)

Incentive payments to youth will be paid by the MMVWB.

Stipend payments: The MMVWB will allow stipend payments to youth participants at \$25/day. These stipends will be paid by the MMVWB.

Youth Work Experience can include the following paid/unpaid activities:

- ❖ Wages/stipends paid to youth in the work experience;
- ❖ Incentive payments directly tied to the completion of work experience;
- ❖ Employability skill/job readiness training to prepare youth for work experience;
- ❖ Participant work experience orientation sessions;
- ❖ Classroom training or the required academic component directly related to the work experience;
- ❖ Orientations for employers

Documentation/Tracking: Training provider shall document/track youth time for stipend, incentive payments and/or wages. This documentation must be provided to the Career Center Youth Employment Counselor and the MMVWB.

Stipend Guidelines

WIOA In-School and Out-of-School Youth Group Programs

The training provider will submit weekly timesheets to the MMVWB Youth Program Manager and MMVWB Workforce Development Manager every Friday by 4pm by email to cgomez@masshiremvwb.org and aseripais@masshiremvwb.org, respectively. The MMVWB Youth Program Manager will verify and approve the information provided and submit it to the fiscal staff for payment.

The MMVWB Youth Program Manager must ensure that completed direct deposit forms are submitted to fiscal staff before youth starts the program.

WIOA Out-of-School Youth ITAs

Youth will complete Direct Deposit form as a part of their ITA request package from the Career Center. Training vendor will submit weekly timesheet to Career Center which will then be sent by the Career Center to MMVWB Fiscal Administrator vgandhi@masshiremvwb.org.

Incentive Guidelines

WIOA In-School and Out-of-School Youth Group Programs

Incentive payments to youth will be paid by the contracted training vendor through the cost reimbursement contract with the MMVWB/City of Lawrence. Proof of which benchmark has been met as well as the youth's collection of their incentive payment must be recorded and provided to the MMVWB Youth Program Manager and MMVWB Workforce Development Manager by email to cgomez@masshiremvwb.org and aseripais@masshiremvwb.org, respectively.

WIOA Out-of-School Youth ITAs

The customer's respective Career Center Employment Counselor will track the Youth's training completion as well as their employment retention. Once one of the two benchmarks as outlined above has been attained, notice and proof* will be provided to MMVWB Fiscal Administrator vgandhi@masshiremvwb.org to be processed. The payment will be released in the form of a check or gift card to the customer from MMVWB.

*Proof of training completion would be a certificate of completion from the training vendor.

*Proof of employment 30-day retention would be formal notice to MMVWB Fiscal Administrator along with completed data in MOSES under Services and Employment tab.

Payment Procedure

Funds will be directly deposited into the youth's bank account every two weeks or distributed in the form of a gift card or check (see above for specifics).

Chairman Yopez asked for a motion to approve the MMVWB WIOA Youth Payment Policy Update.

Motion made by Cal Williams, seconded by Vilma Dominguez-Martinez to approve the MMVWB WIOA Youth Payment Policy update. Motion passed unanimously.

VII. Report of the Executive Director

In Frank Bonet's absence, Corina said good morning. Frank is currently out and sends his well wishes.

We have collaborated with Helfrich Brothers through a Mass CEC grant to develop a comprehensive implementation plan for establishing a welding academy. This initiative aims to equip students in the Merrimack Valley with the essential skills needed for employment in Climate-Critical priority occupations. As Frank shared during the January meeting, this partnership is highly beneficial and aligns with the Chair's remarks regarding the 250th Anniversary of the Industrial Revolution.

The current OSCC contract will conclude at the end of June 2025, and in compliance with MGL 30b, a new Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued for the renewal of services, and after having our WIOA partners and board members reviewed the sole bidder, the contract was awarded to the Greater Lawrence Community Action Council.

Under the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson and through the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the Greater Lawrence Community Action Council, Inc. originated in 1965 as the Lawrence Community Action Council and in Jan 1966 the Greater Lawrence CAC was established as a means of fighting the war on poverty. As stated in the agency by-laws, the primary purpose of GLCAC, Inc. is to encourage and promote the improvement of community life in Greater Lawrence with special emphasis on, but not limited to, the initiation of programs in education, social services, childcare, health, housing, youth employment and related fields. Since its inception, the GLCAC, Inc. has been a consistent partner in working with local, State and Federal governments and private agencies in creating opportunities and providing hope for people living in poverty.

Currently GLCAC, Inc., is under the direction of board member Vilma Martinez-Dominguez, and serves over 36,000 clients in a variety of programs and has an annual operating budget of over \$43.7M and is in its 60th year of existence and of providing such services.

MHMVWB is enthusiastic about this new phase in workforce development and looks forward to continuing its partnership with GLCAC under new conditions.

To ensure a seamless transition of operations with minimal disruption, NECC, GLCAC, MHMVCC, and spearheaded by MHMVWB, have worked on a transition plan and is to be completed. Once completed, we intend to share with board members. We have established the transition team, we are currently developing a timeline (in phases), have a communication plan in place, and we are preparing for knowledge transfer, resources and system handover, staff support and retention, and have discussed monitoring and evaluating the transition and creating a contingency plan.

On March 29, 2025, I attended the Annual National Association of Workforce Board Forum (NAWB Forum25). I regret to report that I do not have positive updates concerning the future of WIOA. Our understanding of the situation remains unchanged since my visit to Washington, D.C.; the reauthorization of WIOA is currently at a standstill, and discussions regarding funding for FY26 are still ongoing. However, he did acquire valuable insights and information about programs and strategies, which he has shared with our staff and partners.

This concludes my report. Thank you.

Juan said thank you. I would like to thank and highlight Northern Essex Community College for being the operator of the Career Center for eight years under the leadership of Lane Glenn and his team. I have spoken with Lane, and they are working with Vilma and her team to make sure it's a smooth transition. Congratulations to Vilma and her team and GLCAC. They do a tremendous job working for the community and I'm looking forward to working with you going forward.

Andrew Herlihy said I'm looking forward to working with GLCAC. Did the Board vote for the operator of the Career Center and Corina said yes. The vote was taken by the Board via electronic vote (March 5, 2025).

Andrew said I have spoken with Mayor Barrett and for the first time in this quarter century, there is no Career Center presence in Haverhill as of this month. Hopefully it's temporary. Haverhill is the 15th largest city in the state. Only Somerville and Newton are larger cities that don't have Career Center presence. I and city officials supported closing the Haverhill Career Center, but we are trying to keep some sort of presence in Haverhill. Multiple city officials were surprised about the most recent news about the Career Center shutdown at Makelt Haverhill. The new RFP calls for a Career Center presence in Haverhill. We just don't want to get too comfortable without any presence of the Career Center in Haverhill. If this situation continues, I hope the Board entertains this issue at a future meeting agenda. Corina said that prior to his vacation, Frank was involved in various meetings since he was notified that the Makelt Haverhill location closed, however, I wasn't able to follow up on these meetings prior to his vacation. The RFP does call for an Affiliate Career Center in Haverhill.

Vilma said we have yet to sign the contract. We are still in negotiations, but we will have a conversation about Haverhill because that is a requirement and Juan said Haverhill has always been an important piece for the Board and the Career Center. I'm sure as it's a requirement that it will get worked out to serve the citizens of Haverhill and surrounding communities.

VIII. Other Business

Wilson DeLos Santos said are there any contingencies in place in case the state or federal government do not fund training for the youth programs and Corina said we're expecting a cut and that impacts the number of people we can provide training services to. At the MVMWB, we have other funding coming in from DESE, the Department of Education for Connecting Activities and YouthWorks for the summer and year-round programs. Usually when we see cuts, we reduce the number of slots and sometimes it impacts staffing. In terms of a contingency plan, I can't speak to that. Frank can report back as he just got back from NAWB and has information he can share and Vilma said that's the case for many programs. It's very difficult. You have as much of a contingency plan as you can but it's difficult when you don't know what's going to happen. We have a lobbyist in Washington.

Frank Amato said I'm thankful for this opportunity. I'm also the President of the Building and Trades Unions (electricians, plumbers, painters and laborers). We protect workers' rights. If there is anything I can help with, for example, career fairs, etc., or if you have any questions, please contact me. We're looking to give people opportunities.

IX. Adjournment (vote required)

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

Motion made by Cal Williams to adjourn, seconded by Wilson DeLos Santos. Motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda Buete

Recorder