

**BERKS COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
(WDB)**

**7:30 a.m.
December 9, 2022**

Meeting Summary

Members Present (via MS Teams Meeting)

Ms. Debra Antol
Ms. Jenny Batista
Ms. Auria Bradley
Mr. Ryan Breisch
Dr. Karen Campbell
Ms. Ashley Chambers
Mr. John DeVere (via phone)
Ms. Kristi Gage-Linderman
Mr. Robert Harrop
Ms. Peggy Kershner
Mr. Scott Mengle
Ms. Debra Millman
Mr. James Nichols
Mr. Richard Olmos
Mr. Mark Pinkasavage
Ms. Patricia Shermot
Mr. Barry Unger

Members Absent

Ms. Kimberly Baskett
Mr. William Dorward
Ms. Marianne Egolf
Mr. Michael Fischetti
Ms. Christy Pisker
Ms. Alexia Pursley
Ms. Karen Troxell
Mr. David Turner

Staff and Guests Present

Mr. Daniel Fogarty	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Amber Columbo	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Megan Noll	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff (call in)
Ms. Matika Palmer	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Patricia Spencer	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Rory Stevenson	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Robert Kerecz	PA CareerLink [®] Employment Services Team Supervisor
Ms. Helen Konnick	PA CareerLink [®] Berks County Administrator
Mr. Andre Hardy	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Ms. Marybeth Williams	Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations
Ms. Heather Berger	County of Berks Information Systems
Mr. Mohamed Silah	County of Berks Information Systems

Mr. Fogarty conducted a roll call and confirmed that a quorum was present.

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Gage-Linderman, Chairperson, at 7:34 a.m.

Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting was being streamed for the public via YouTube through the County's website. As a result, the meeting was being recorded for minutes purposes only and will then be deleted. To assist staff with keeping the official minutes, members participating were asked to clearly state their name when making or seconding any motions and when making comments.

The Consent Agenda and all associated documents were provided to members previously in time for review. The applicable consent agenda items are as follows:

- Approval of Previous Meeting's Minutes (September 16, 2022)
- Approval of Revised Incentive Policy as recommended by the One Stop Oversight Committee
- Approval of Outreach Policy recommended by the One Stop Oversight Committee

On Ms. Gage-Linderman's behalf, Mr. Fogarty asked if there were any items to be moved from the consent agenda. There were no such requests. On Ms. Gage-Linderman's behalf, Mr. Fogarty announced that the consent agenda was adopted with no abstentions.

Introducing the Executive Committee Report, Ms. Gage-Linderman commented that although Ms. Yvelisse Gonzalez was not in attendance, she expressed her thanks to her for the six months that she spent on the Berks County Board. Ms. Gonzalez accepted a new position with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation in Wilkes-Barre. Ms. Gage-Linderman also recognized the three years that Mr. Thomas McNelis devoted to the Board and especially as Chair of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee. Ms. Gage-Linderman said that Ms. Ashley Chambers would be taking over the Chair position on the DEI Committee. Ms. Gage-Linderman welcomed Mr. Ryan to the WDB. Mr. Breisch has been employed by the Literacy Council for 30 years and previously served as an off-Board member of the One Stop Oversight Committee. Ms. Gage-Linderman also welcomed Ms. Kimberly Baskett, Acting District Administrator of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, to the Board. With the addition of Ms. Baskett, the Board is now at our full complement of 25 members. Lastly, Ms. Gage-Linderman announced that after 42 years of service to the Commonwealth, Mr. Nichols was attending his last meeting as a Board member and would be retiring from his State position effective December 9, 2022. Mr. Nichols commented that it has been a long ride, and complimented Mr. Fogarty and his team. Ms. Gage-Linderman noted that there would be a few reassignments to the Board's committees forthcoming.

Ms. Columbo (WDB Assistant Director), referred to the WIOA Title I Performance Outcomes for the 1st Quarter PY2022 Program Year-to-Date Results, commenting that the data was not current but was the latest available. She noted that our targeted "green check" was not received by Berks nor for the Commonwealth overall, but added that we are not overly concerned given the relatively low numbers of participants included for each program and the time lag in the data reported. The data has been shared with contractors to make sure their records match and to help the contractors understand where we stood at the end of the first quarter PY2022.

Ms. Gage-Linderman reminded members that Mr. David Turner would become the Board's Chairperson effective January 1, 2023. Mr. Fogarty added that Ms. Gage-Linderman, Mr. Turner and he had a very productive phone conversation recently to discuss the transition.

Ms. Noll (WDB Fiscal Manager) was introduced by Mr. Fogarty to provide the Finance Committee report. Ms. Noll commented on the PY2022 Budget vs. Actual Expenditure Report stating that there were no substantial issues and that all expenditures are within budget.

Referring to the PY22 Revised Budget Proposed (11/22/22), Ms. Noll noted that a statewide activity grant was awarded in the amount of \$148,262 of which \$8,262 was provided to cover the purchase of new desks for six WDB staff members. In addition, \$100,000 was awarded to increase the number of work experience opportunities available under the WIOA Youth contract and \$40,000 was awarded to cover the DEI Symposium which was to use WIOA Adult formula funds in the original budget. The statewide activity grant award now allows for the originally budgeted \$50,000 in WIOA Adult formula funds for the DEI Symposium to be re-purposed. Mr. Fogarty commented that we experienced some operational increases this year including increased salaries for both the Fiscal Coordinator and Fiscal Manager positions on the Board staff. In addition, \$10,000 was added for the fiscal monitoring consultation obtained from an outside accounting firm that assisted with the Equus PY2021 Fiscal Monitoring review and determination.

Mr. Fogarty requested a motion to approve the revised budget. Mr. DeVere so moved and the motion was seconded by Mr. Olmos. All members voted their approval of the revised budget. There were no abstentions.

Mr. Fogarty next reported that the Board is 100% compliant following a recently received PA L&I PY2021 Program and Fiscal Monitoring Report. There were three minor findings noted, none of which were fiscal or procurement related and which were resolved very quickly. He said it has been a very successful year thanks to the good work and collaboration of Board and CareerLink staff.

Ms. Gage-Linderman invited Mr. DeVere to comment on the Training and Industry Partnership Committee report. Mr. DeVere began by reading portions of the proposed Customized Job Training (CJT) Policy explaining that "Customized Job Training" means training by an employer(s) or by a training provider in conjunction with an employer that is provided to three or more paid participants concurrently while engaged in productive work in a job that: (a) provides knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the occupation, (b) provides reimbursement to the employer(s) for the costs of providing the training and additional supervision related to the training, (c) is limited in duration as appropriate to the occupation for which the participants are being trained.

The proposed policy includes eligibility requirements both for participants and employers as well as occupational eligibility. The policy also specifies general WIOA CJT requirements, a maximum time frame of six months and funding levels. In addition, employer requirements are detailed within the policy.

Mr. Fogarty commented that this is a “new tool in the toolbox”. He said that there is not a lot of appetite for individual on-the-job (OJT) training because employers are interested in getting people on board very quickly. This new policy can be used for CareerLink customers and would be tried for one year. Ms. Gage-Linderman asked if there were any questions. There being none, she asked for a motion to approve the policy. Mr. Olmos moved to adopt the Customized Job Training Policy and Ms. Batista seconded the motion. Ms. Gage-Linderman abstained from voting because the policy involves staffing agencies. All remaining members voted in favor. There were no abstentions other than from Ms. Gage-Linderman.

Mr. DeVere thanked Mr. Stevenson for preparing the PA Nursing Pathway Apprenticeship Industry Partnership Grant Proposal which was submitted to the PA Department of Labor and Industry by the November 30, 2022 deadline. He commented that healthcare has been on our radar for some time and nurses remain critically important positions. He added that attractive career pathways are important and plentiful in the healthcare field. The Board is the lead applicant in the proposal with the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) as convener and the Reading Area Community College (RACC) as the training and educational provider. Mr. Fogarty noted that the award announcement could arrive by mid-February. The proposal requests nearly \$180,000 for the program over a three-year period.

On Ms. Gage-Linderman’s behalf, Mr. Fogarty invited Ms. Batista to provide the Youth Committee report. Ms. Batista commented on the Reading School District’s new partnership activities with our youth program provider Equus and the Berks County Intermediate Unit. She noted that the Connecting Young Adults to Employment (CYAE) Program was so successful that the Reading School District and Equus are now looking to adopt a similar program from student-to-student tutoring to other occupations in 2023 and to serve at least 40 students through August 2023. Ms. Batista asked Ms. Columbo to give an update on the Disconnected Young Adult Study Subcommittee’s planning. Ms. Columbo noted that the Subcommittee wants to move forward with an event in Spring, 2023 as a follow up to the needs identified in the WDB’s 2017 study. She added that the numbers of disconnected youth are still disturbingly high. Ms. Gage-Linderman commented on the great work being accomplished by the Youth Committee.

Ms. Chambers was invited to comment on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee’s activity. Ms. Chambers noted Mr. Thomas McNelis’ retirement from the Board and the DEI Committee and wished him the best. She also welcomed Ms. Kimberly Baskett to the Committee as a Board member and Mr. Alexander Rodriguez, Berks Personnel Network to the Committee as a non-Board member. Ms. Chambers asked Ms. Columbo to comment on the proposed DEI Symposium. Ms. Columbo noted that our contractor Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) has identified a current employee who is an Equal Opportunity Liaison for two counties within the Southeast Region. The DEI employer forum subcommittee met this week with EDSI and some suggestions for the Symposium were proposed. Another planning meeting will be held in February, 2023 via MS Teams. Ms. Gage-Linderman thanked Ms. Chambers for accepting appointment to chair the DEI Committee.

Ms. Gage-Linderman next invited Ms. Kershner to provide the One Stop Oversight Committee Report. Ms. Kershner noted that the notes from the November 28, 2022 Committee meeting were very comprehensive. Referring to the *By the Numbers* report for the period July

2022 – September 2022, she pointed out that the total foot traffic for the period was 5,617 and there were 205 orientation participants. She further added that many virtual services continue to be provided to customers through the PA CareerLink® Berks County. Ms. Kershner noted that 96 employers were represented at the November 9, 2022 Job Fair held at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel and that 552 job seekers attended the event. Although parking at the hotel's indoor garage was limited, the team worked very well directing traffic and a shuttle bus left from the CareerLink's parking lot on Kutztown Road to go to the hotel. Ms. Columbo added that the lease for the PA CareerLink's operation is currently held by the County through May 31, 2023 when it will be assumed by our CareerLink operator EDSI. Although it is not anticipated that a move will occur in 2023, a possible move is under consideration in 2024 or 2025.

To conclude the Committee reports, Mr. Fogarty offered a brief review of the Planning Committee's report. He noted the Chair's position is currently vacant. He reminded members that an updated Industry Sector priorities list for 2022-2027 was approved by the full Board on September 16, 2022. Subsequently Board staff have started working on our WIOA Four-year Plan Modification which is required by the PA Department of Labor & Industry to be submitted for initial review by February 24, 2023. Ms. Columbo and Mr. Stevenson will provide a first draft to the Planning Committee by early January 2023. Mr. Fogarty noted that the plan modification will include new and valuable information from the County's *Imagine Berks* economic and community development plan.

Before offering some brief comments from his COO report which he said would lead into the Market Intelligence discussion, Dan noted that this meeting was the 16th Board meeting which had been led by Ms. Gage-Linderman as Chairperson. He thanked her for her guidance and leadership of the WDB over the past very challenging four years.

Referring to East Penn Manufacturing's 75th Anniversary of amazing growth, Mr. Fogarty thanked Mr. Harrop on his ongoing leadership as one of our most experienced WDB members. Mr. Harrop thanked Mr. Fogarty for the recognition of the company's celebration and success. East Penn employs over 7,800 local residents to help manufacture more than 40 million batteries each year.

Mr. Fogarty noted that the first ever Berks County Consumer Sentiment report was recently published under the Berks County WDB's research contract with the EDC of Lancaster County's *Center for Regional Analysis*. This initial report and three more planned bimonthly reports are intended to provide insight into where our local business conditions are headed over the near and medium terms. These reports will prove helpful in working with the WDB's Planning Committee to modify the current four-year WIOA local plan.

On the "National Picture", Mr. Fogarty noted that average hourly wages across the country in November were 5.1% higher than a year earlier. Prior to the pandemic, average hourly wages were rising about 3.0% annually. The median job tenure for U.S. wage and salary workers in January 2022 was 4.1 years which matches the level for January 2020 and remained very close to tenure levels in 2014 and 2016. This compares to higher average tenures of 4.6 years in 2012 and 2014.

In Berks County, two plant closings and layoffs were reported recently. Stitch Fix, a clothing manufacturer that operates online, issued a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) on October 3 in conjunction with its decision to close its local Mohnton Mills manufacturing facility leading to the layoff of 56 workers. Stitch Fix management welcomed our local response team onsite to connect with 42 of the impacted employees well ahead of their last day of work with meetings held in both English and Spanish.

The Loomis Company, an insurance brokerage firm headquartered on Park Road in Wyomissing, issued its own WARN notice of November 2 covering 210 employees who would be losing their jobs due to the non-renewal of a major customer contract. Loomis management explained that 97% of the impacted employees worked virtually from their homes. Accordingly, a virtual Rapid Response team meeting with impacted employees was planned for December 15.

Opening the floor for Board member comment, Mr. Fogarty asked the question “What is different about December 2022 from December 2021 and what do we expect in 2023?”

Ms. Gage-Linderman commented that the staffing industry has faced very challenging labor market trends and are exhausted trying to keep up. She and others in the industry are waiting to see what will happen in the future.

Mr. Unger noted that people have more choices and opportunities than ever to make career changes. Two of his skilled mechanical employees recently moved to a large local manufacturing employer. His mechanical contracting company is paying good wages, but they have also lost some employees to pharmaceutical companies as well. He said everyone is looking for plumbers and he is exhausted.

Mr. Fogarty complimented Mr. Unger on his outstanding registered apprenticeship program which is a best practice to attract, train and retain good people.

Mr. Olmos noted that as a non-profit employer, they do not have extra money to pay people who want to move to higher paying jobs. He added that most of their employees do not wish to leave their clients and have a real passion for their work. He said that we are all hurting.

Mr. Fogarty commented our Berks Service Corps young adults were placed with non-profits which was designed as a temporary solution during the height of the pandemic. The program yielded favorable results.

Ms. Batista added to Mr. Unger’s comments saying that the talent pipeline must be filled with students and that the more we can work with CTCs for internships the better it will be. She said students should not be pushed only to attend college when there are other opportunities available.

Ms. Shermot stated that Visions opened an office at 35 North Sixth, a building that Alan Shuman did such a good job in rehabbing. Visions was able to hire 25 additional customer support representatives with one intern in a supervisory position in this new branch office. A real success story.

Mr. Pinkasavage referred to the Training and Industry Partnership report, stating that 150 applicants were being looked at for next year's IBEW Local 743 apprenticeships. He added that he was feeling very optimistic with 450 very busy electrician journeymen in their membership.

Dr. Campbell commented that lots of things are going on in Albright College's new "career academy". Students are placed with employers as they finish high school. They have experience and are excited to move on.

Ms. Gage-Linderman commended the "great discussion".

She then asked if there was any public comment. There was no comment from the four members of the public listening to the YouTube broadcast.

Stating that the next Board meeting would be held at 7:30 a.m. on March 24, 2023 in person at the PA CareerLink® Berks County, she wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays and adjourned the meeting at 8:57 a.m.