



State of Tennessee

State Workforce Development Board Meeting

MEETING MINUTES

Friday August 28, 2020 - 9:00 AM – 11:30 PM CDT via Webex

<u>Board Members Present</u>		<u>Board Members Present by Proxy</u>	<u>Members Absent</u>
Martha Axford (East)	J. Paul Jackson Assistant Commissioner Mandy Johnson		Designee: Deputy Commissioner Cherrell Campbell-Street for Commissioner Danielle Barnes
Proxy Brandy Foust for Senator Paul Bailey	Designee: Policy Director Tony Niknejad for Governor Bill Lee		
Interim Assistant Commissioner Jay Baker	Commissioner Jeff McCord		Proxy Sarah Noel for Representative Clark Boyd
	Vonda McDaniel		
Jason Bates	Mayor E.L. Morton		
Tim Berry	Greg Persinger		
	Stuart Price		
Rhonnie Brewer	Barry Ray		
Mayor Kevin Brooks	Designee: Director Ann Thompson for Commissioner Bob Rolfe		
Michelle Falcon	Designee: Chief Jean Luna for Commissioner Penny Schwinn		
Ben Ferguson (Southwest)	Kyle Spurgeon		
Bill Godwin	Jeff Vance		
Marshall Graves (Southeast)	Kevin Vaughn		
Ann Hatcher	Ron Wade (Greater Memphis)		
Christine Hopkins (Southern Middle)			

Location in parenthesis represents the state board members' membership to the local workforce board.

Welcome

Chairman Berry called the Webex meeting to order at approx. 9:10 a.m. He began by establishing some logistics and protocols for our virtual meeting. Chairman Berry acknowledged the change to our board configuration based on federal regulations as he welcomed new board members Ron Wade, Kyle Spurgeon, Jeff Vance, J. Paul Jackson, Barry Ray, Assistant Commissioner Mandy Johnson for Vocational Rehabilitation, and Interim Assistant Commissioner Jay Baker for Adult Education. Chairman Berry noted that he appreciated their willingness to join the board and be a part of what we're trying to accomplish for state. He also acknowledged the good news of Mayor Kevin Brooks' complete recovery from COVID-19.

Roll Call

Iler Bradley conducted the roll call and established the presence of a quorum.

Approval of Minutes (vote required)

Chairman Berry requested a motion to approve the June 5, 2020 minutes. It was moved by Jason Bates and seconded by Marshall Graves. Chairman Berry asked for verbal discussion and comments via chat. Hearing and seeing none, he asked for opposition or abstention from the vote. Seeing and hearing none, the motion to accept the minutes was approved.

Workforce Advisory Overview – Dr. Jeff McCord, Commissioner – TN Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Commissioner McCord thanked the board for their support and encouragement during this challenging time. He also thanked the local areas and the people that make those partnerships possible for being on the front lines and doing amazing work. While a lot of work has been done, we still have a lot of work to do and we're encouraged by some of the latest numbers on unemployment insurance trending down. It is obvious that unemployment insurance and workforce development are two sides of the same coin and he is excited about the coming initiatives to integrate those two processes. Regarding the future of workforce development, the fundamentals are still fundamental which we see in the amazing work that has been done during this whole time with the apprenticeship programs led by Tyra Copas. They have surpassed their career goal during this COVID-19 crisis and doubled the amount of new apprenticeship programs that would typically start during the year. Employers still see and need skilled workers and still will partner and invest to make that happen. Regarding our health and economic condition, we have a lot of hope and optimism that we will move right into doing the work that we really love to do and that's getting people back to work.

Unemployment Insurance Update – Rusty Felts, Assistant Commissioner – TN Department of Labor and Workforce Development – UI

Mr. Felts joined by phone and thanked the board for the opportunity to speak on such an important subject. Since mid-March we have taken in excess of 800,000 new unemployment claims. Additional claims are not included in this number. We've had to face regular unemployment claims, disaster unemployment claims due to the tornadoes that went through our state twice, pandemic unemployment, the FPUC program where we added \$600 to benefits for so many weeks, extensions when people drew out of whatever program they were on, and now our latest challenge was the Lost Wage Assistance program (LWA) and adding the \$300 to the benefit checks for the weeks since 8/1.

I'm glad to report that Tennessee is one of the few states that has done that in the country and as of this morning we are on pace to have already paid 260,000 Tennessee that additional \$300 for those three weeks. I will stress that we have a few more to go but I'm super proud of efforts of my team that we've already done that for so many Tennesseans. Unemployment rates in mid-March were around 3.5% and now in August the rate is 9.5%. We've had significant challenges in the last few months that everybody is aware of. There are so many different programs, some of which have never been administered before, so my team has been working with our vendor and we've done that successfully. Every time the quarter changes in unemployment you must go back and reassess some claimants to see if you're paying them on the right program. We are audited by USDOL through the Comptroller to make sure we're paying correctly so that has been a huge obstacle to overcome. We were staffed for a 3.5% unemployment rate in the state and then we had to fight the sheer volume of claims. We hired extra resources in call center companies which has been beneficial, and Dr. Lovett's Workforce Services Division really stepped up in addition to all the other departments to give us some extra resources.

One of the biggest challenges is that unemployment is a confusing program in regular circumstances. When you add all the misconception that will put in there with the CARES Act, and now LWA, and sometimes the media, the wrong message gets out there. One of our most important challenges for this state is the reimplementation our job search program. I've met with Dr. Lovett and Deputy Commissioner Thomas and we're working on that together. That's a significant need for our claimants and our employer base. It's vitally important to get these folks back to work for the success of our state.

Successes include paying out approximately \$5 billion dollars in unemployment to Tennesseans and that's not counting the new LWA payment that we've made in the last few days. Commissioner McCord signed off on a process that allowed us to get money in claimants' hands faster.

Mr. Felts acknowledged the invaluable support he and his team have received from the legislative level, the Governor's Office, this board, Commissioner McCord and Deputy Commissioner Thomas.

Commissioner Berry: Just working off the conversation you and I had, can you give us just a little bit of insight as to what we might expect in the next 6 months or so. I know it's almost impossible to predict the unpredictable but just tell us what you think...and we won't hold you accountable if you get it wrong. Based on the trends you've seen so far, what do you think we as a board should expect and what do you think we'll see coming up with unemployment over the next six months?

Rusty Felts: From my standpoint, I'm lucky to have support from my Deputy Commissioner and Commissioner McCord in that they share a belief that I've had for years. I've been in unemployment so long: I used to work in the career center where claimants would get unemployment and at the same time when they signed up for unemployment if they weren't going back to work we instantly started job searching. I'm fortunate to work for two people who believe this is one organization not two.

I'm seeing some trending down of unemployment and I think that things are looking up. I don't know what that'll look like in 2 months when you're in a pandemic with so many variables that you can't predict. I don't know what will happen in 2 months or 6 months, but I will tell you the most important challenge for this state and all of us is getting our workforce back out there to work. You and I discussed the other day that what we don't want is for our workforce to be off so long this year that next year when they work for an employer who has seasonal or regular layoffs, we don't want them to be in 2021 and going through those regular periods of separation that they're used to and then not being eligible for unemployment based on their base period wages that would be absent as a result of this pandemic. That's a big challenge for our state: we desperately need to get back to work because that's something we don't want to face in a year or so when the extensions from the federal government run out.

Commissioner Berry: Thank you for that and I just appreciate everyone's stance on trying to keep the economy open, trying to keep businesses open, and doing everything possible to keep them in the workforce because that's the best opportunity for them to have the support they need to get from their jobs.

Rusty Felts: Absolutely, thank you.

Chairman Berry: Just calling attention to Rhonnie Brewer's comment in the chat and everybody saying thank you to you and your team for your work during this time. And I share that sentiment and wanted to pass it along since you cannot see the chat.

Rusty Felts: Yes sir, I will pass that along to my team.

[Policy Approvals \(votes required\)](#)

The board reviewed three (3) policies.

Oversight Committee - 1st policy: Transfer Authority

Oversight Committee Chair Ann Hatcher presented the Transfer Authority policy. This policy ensures the local boards are using the Grants4TN system to process transfer requests for funds between WIOA and the dislocated worker programs. It is an effort to try to get more electronic and digital as we all are doing these days.

Chairman Berry requested a motion to accept the changes as noted in the policy. It was moved by Ben Ferguson and seconded by Tony Niknejad. Chairman Berry asked for verbal discussion on recommended changes to this policy. Hearing no discussion, he asked for the vote and assumed agreement unless he heard opposition or abstention from the vote verbally or via chat. Hearing and seeing none, the policy was approved as presented.

Operations Committee – 2nd policy: Youth Eligibility and 3rd policy: SCSEP

Operations Committee Chair Stuart Price presented two policies for the board's approval: Youth Eligibility and the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP).

The Youth Eligibility policy outlines youth eligibility and definitions as defined by USDOL for the WIOA Title I comprehensive Youth Employment Program. The revisions presented within the policy that will require additional actions by the local board but will offer the flexibility to be innovative and distinctively define a specific youth population for their areas. Two policy revisions were introduced by Interim Assistant Commissioner Jay Baker: 1) references to Tennessee Department of Adult Education on page 3, section 3b and page 4, section 3c be changed to local providers of adult education services or something similar, and 2) language was added on page 3, section 3b to clarify that adult education providers should only provide testing for out-of-school youth participants to remain compliant with adult education eligibility.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) policy addresses SCSEP host agency closures due to natural disasters and pandemics. The need for this new State Workforce Development board policy was recognized largely as a result of the COVID impact on our senior participants. This policy will allow participants to receive paid sick leave for those who are unable to participate in the required program activities due to work

pandemic restrictions and or natural disaster related closures. Participants who meet the criteria would be eligible to receive up to 80 hours (two pay periods) at their current hourly wage. The policy also allows participants to request sick leave in situations where elected officials declared an emergency and issued executive orders with specific restrictions (i.e. school closures, travel restrictions, restrictions on gathering, or public transportation restrictions).

Chairman Berry requested a motion to accept the changes for both policies as presented. It was moved by Ron Wade and seconded by Vonda McDaniel. Chairman Berry asked for verbal discussion on recommended changes to these policies. Hearing no discussion, he asked for the vote and assumed agreement unless he heard opposition or abstention from the vote verbally or via chat. Hearing and seeing none, the policies were approved as presented.

Mr. Price recognized and thanked Nakeisha Ricks for her outstanding service to the Operations committee and for working through this difficult landscape to get things done and done well.

[Overview of Regional and Local Planning Process – Kenyatta Lovett, Assistant Commissioner TN Department of Labor and Workforce Development](#)

Chairman Berry thanked the entire Workforce Services team for diligently working to review the plans and submit recommendations to this board. The local and regional leaders were also thanked and acknowledged for the video presentations they created to make this review process happen smoothly in a virtual environment.

Dr. Lovett provided the backdrop for how WFS got to this point for the review of the local and Regional plans, beginning with the Ernst & Young report released last year which mentioned the need for a little bit more time for the local and local boards in the region to convene with their Partners after the state plan was developed to make sure they develop a thorough plan of action. COVID-19 also created some challenges. Guidance was just approved in April but they had to figure out how to convene virtually and to provide enough information to the board and all partners to make sure that these plans are reflective of a robust workforce services system.

On April 1, guidance was given to the local areas and regions and on June 12, WFS received the first iteration of their plans which also included a 15-day public comment period. WFS submitted their feedback back to the regional and local boards at the end of June. The regions and local areas used the comments and feedback to revise their plans, and what was presented was an iteration of comments, feedback, and the local boards developing a product that would be acceptable for review today. WFS also tried to make sure that the [SWDB] board had enough opportunities to interact and ask questions related to what was being presented to make sure there is an alignment with what you see in the workforce system for the state.

This five-month process will not end whenever these plans are approved: WFS plans to continue with quarterly progress reports beginning in February 2021. This includes a new strategy for technical assistance to make sure those things that the boards endeavor to do in the coming years have enough support from the system office to help them get there.

During this time of COVID-19, the system has come a little closer: we have weekly meetings now with executive directors and regional directors which has allowed them to have a good pulse on what's going on across the state but also for executive directors and local boards to get feedback and also ask questions that are pressing in a weekly manner versus before when it was sometimes a little bit too much time in between. Zoom and Skype have allowed us to be a closer system, and hopefully the videos gave insight regarding what the plans presented. This has been a five-month process that WFS is very proud of.

[Q&A for Regional and Local Plan Approvals \(votes required\)](#)

Chairman Berry asked the presenters not to restate their presentations but to focus on one thing in their presentation that they were really proud of and one concern or need they have that this board can best help them with.

Discussion questions followed these brief presentations. [Note: All regional and local boards graciously thanked the board for reviewing their plans and for the opportunity to make their presentations. Chairman Berry thanked all regional and local boards for their plan submissions.]

[WEST TN Regional Q&A](#)
[Kristie Bennett, Senior Regional Director](#)
(Plan Review Recommendation: Fully Approved)

Ms. Bennett made the following comments:

The West Region plan shows:

- the synergy and collaboration we have had with our partners in our planning councils held throughout the planning period
- a good grasp of their efficiency and applying Regional Workforce initiatives and best practices, along with the

application of innovation models that promote more regionalism in the West region.

The West region was asked how significantly their user rates have been impacted by the transition of clients from an in-person to virtual space due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In all our local presentations across the region there was a slowdown starting in March with the initial state of emergency proclamation but our teams quickly shifted gears to work heavily serving UI customers. We started training additional staff in each AJC across their region to develop a robust team that was ready to assist thousands of claimants flooding the system. This really taught our leaders how to approach this as an opportunity to grow and learn new ways to operate and get us out of our comfort zones. We adjusted the new communication model to switch to the virtual platform to serve our customers and we also focused on what we could do rather than what we couldn't do. We're also using every opportunity to utilize the additional funding streams that are being made available to our area.

There was an impact but now that some time has passed and things are opening, we are seeing an increase across the region. All our centers are open and limiting the number of people in the center to maintain social distancing but we're also virtual so everyone is being served.

Chairman Berry noted vote abstentions for Ben Ferguson and Ron Wade because they serve on local boards in the West Region so it does not appear as a conflict of interest. He asked for a motion to approve the plan for the West Tennessee region. It was moved by Jason Bates and seconded by Bill Godwin. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken with the abstentions noted above with no opposition or additional abstentions. The plan for the West Region was approved.

[Northwest LWDA - Jennifer Bane, Regional Director](#) (Plan Review Recommendation: [Fully Approved](#))

Ms. Bane made the following comments:

We are most proud of our efforts toward fulfilling the Governor's priorities particularly regarding apprenticeship programs as well as our re-entry and re-entry advanced manufacturing program that we have in partnership with vocational training programs. As far as a need is concerned, we've been very fortunate to receive financial support and our biggest need is to keep these programs running. Regarding the effects of COVID, like rest of the state from the end of March through the month of April we could see the significant increase in unemployment customers, with over 12,000 new claims filed in our area. With this increase AJCs shifted their focus to provide meaningful assistance for unemployment to claimants and employers. Unemployment rose to 12.5% in April and we saw a decrease in most of our other programs. For the Title 1 programs he would have expected some decline due to seasonal fluctuations but our enrollment decreased from 99 in the first quarter of this year to 55 in the second quarter. Adult education enrollments decrease from 119 to 33, and Wagner-Peyser decreased from 204 to 45.

Hiring has kicked back up in various Industries including healthcare and manufacturing. We had 38 new on-the-job training participants enrolled since June 1 and about 30 more in progress. Post-secondary institutions began to reopen. We have seen 76 occupational training enrollments since June which is up just slightly from 73 during this time last year. We've also continued to enroll young adults and paid work experience during this time, and we had 28 enrolled since June 1. Staff have been equipped for the virtual space with laptops and other equipment.

Chairman Berry: Thank you Jennifer. One thing I noticed in the presentation was the employer engagement: you really had some good best practices to share and just appreciate you putting those on the website. I would encourage all the other regions to go look at that and see what they're doing to get that employer engagement as high as they are.

Chairman Berry asked for questions for Northwest. Seeing and hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the plan for the Northwest LWDA as presented. It was moved by J. Paul Jackson and seconded by Ben Ferguson. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken with no opposition or abstentions. The plan for the Northwest LWDA was approved with no further caveats.

[Southwest LWDA – Kena Hamm, Interim Executive Director](#) (Plan Review Recommendation: [Approved with Conditions](#))

Ms. Hamm made the following comments:

The Southwest has definitely been significantly affected by COVID-19. All programs have reported negative effect to their enrollment especially during the April-June time frame.

Wagner-Peyser had a 62% decrease in enrollments, Title I a 66% decrease, SNAP a 13% decrease, Adult Ed enrollments decreased by 73%, and VR had a 56% decrease. However, with the implementation of virtual enrollment and the phased reopening of the AJCs, enrollment is starting to pick up now. KPI goals have also been negatively impacted as well.

Due to the increase of UI benefits most of the calls and in-person visits have been centered around UI. This is applicable for both customer participants and employers. Many employers reached out for needed assistance with UI instead of the main focus of recruitment and workforce service needs. Much of the effort over the last couple of months has shifted to dislocated workers. Before the pandemic Southwest was fortunate to have a low number of dislocated workers however they anticipate an increase of eligible participants who need employment and training activities as well as support services due to temporary and permanent layoffs.

Regional director Holly Wood noted that Southwest going to comply with the conditions required for full approval of their plan. She made the following comments:

Upon review earlier in the week of the measures that needed further attention in the operating systems and strategies section, we've already begun to address some of these and feel like we can complete these provisions quickly. Measures were identified that require more specific details centered around our local board strategies and additional partner input. We are confident these items will be addressed in full to receive approval status of our local plan. Furthermore, we're prepared provide progress reports to ensure accountability. We have a new executive director Vicky Bunch who will start on September 1 so our local leadership team will be focusing heavily on strategic planning and goals so the Southwest reaches its full potential.

A few highlights from our plan video include significant progress within the last year or so. We are implementing some new innovative ideas and some best practices from other areas. We've recently started a jail program in one of our at-risk counties and are hoping to do more. We are working to implement manufacturing days. We've got a lot more to come so hopefully you will be able to see that progress is made in our quarterly reports to you all.

Chairman Berry thanked Ms. Wood for addressing the Approved with Conditions status of the plan.

Ben Ferguson: This is not a question but more of a comment. Miss Holly referenced not only dealing with COVID and several other things but we also had to go through a director transition. I want to commend Holly and Kena for the herculean effort over the last few months to keep everything moving forward. Thanks to those two in addition to the rest of the board.

Chairman Berry noted a vote abstention for Ben Ferguson because of his involvement with this local board. He asked for a motion to approve the plan for the Southwest LWDA with the conditions they have addressed. It was moved by Marshall Graves and seconded by Jason Bates. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken with the abstention noted above with no opposition or additional abstentions. The plan for the Southwest LWDA was approved as presented with those conditions.

[Greater Memphis LWDA – Kyla Guyette, Executive Director](#)
(Plan Review Recommendation: [Approved with Conditions](#))

Ms. Guyette made the following comments:

Regarding the question about technology, we are enrolling online and able to upload documents virtually. We are doing supportive services through reloadable cards so participants don't have to come into a center to receive those services.

ITAs and OJTs are actually back to normal: all their providers have moved to an online virtual platform so enrollments are continuing and actually back to a normal service levels. Regarding the question of whether service wait times were longer, they are not: our traffic has greatly decreased we've had a 77% decrease in our overall traffic through their centers but all of our AJCs are open through appointment for walk-ins so there is no wait time.

We have two providers that are having robust online learning platforms with thousands of online classes and tutoring skills and basic skills for any participants who would like to utilize their services. Regarding youth, we have three providers: one of our providers has all 14 elements delivered in-house. Any of the providers refer back to their provider that has all 14 elements so we keep youth in-house and they aren't shuffled around to outside agencies. We also have a partnership particularly with Lyft for ride shares and that's going to be throughout the entire region that's coming up probably in the next month and especially for young adults who don't have the transportation or in our rural areas where transportation is a challenge we think the partnership with Lyft is going to meet a significant need.

We have work experience that's picking up dramatically because we have moved to a virtual platform. We are going to have virtual work experiences for young adults who are not able to do it in-person. Laptops are already being purchased for young adults who need that service in order to continue with their programs.

Business Services manager Roderick Woody described the implementation of initiatives in support of the business services strategy.

They include:

- a. conducting monthly business service partner meeting and highlighting featured employers in our industry sectors.
- b. enhancing employer engagement by listening to their employers and addressing their actual concerns.
- c. utilizing Jobs4TN for job orders and virtual recruitment

-
-
- d. holding more customized recruitment events and pre-screening based on the employers' specifications, not just having open-ended job fairs
 - e. presenting untapped talent to those employers focusing on individuals that may have a criminal background, youth, dislocated workers, and individuals with disabilities
 - f. reintroducing those business grants to the employers

Chairman Berry thanked Mr. Woody for his insight in addressing some of those questions and asked if there were any more questions.

Marshall Graves: This is less of a question but in my tenure on this board I would say this team has really put a tremendous amount of energy in improvement over the last year and I congratulate them and appreciate their engagement.

Chairman Berry: I couldn't agree more Marshall - just seen vast improvement in previous plans and they've worked hard to improve those local relationships and meet those requirements of the plan.

Tony Niknejad: This question is for Roderick and Kyla. Can you describe any of the metrics of the business grants or the performance data that you're looking the track as a result of these grants.

Mr. Woody: One of the big biggest matches we are looking at it is retention. We are eliminating any employers who are treating us like a staffing agency...

Tony Niknejad: That's very helpful. Can you generalize or provide any more insight into the types of businesses that you're seeing? Is it the same group or are you starting to see a different set of employers now under the current circumstances?

Mr. Woody: We are starting to see a new group. We are working with some of our unions here. We are looking into our sectors and advanced manufacturing is one where we have a lot of applicants as well as distribution.

Ms. Guyette: One thing in Greater Memphis that we face and we've always faced is the sheer number of providers that do similar services. We always are constantly facing the challenge of many organizations doing similar services oftentimes without the strings of WIOA. I think our business engagement strategy is one that we are always refining to make sure we're providing the biggest ROI that we possibly can.

Tony Niknejad: Thank you – and in terms of providing any other referrals or services to employers I know there are several other business programs that are designed to provide financial relief to employers. Do you have good data on that or do you receive questions on that?

Mr. Woody: Yes, we do. We've recently identified other employers or organizations that don't necessarily offer exactly what we're offering so we traditionally provide information on ECD and various grants that are available that sync with what we're doing on the WIOA side. We are updating other phases to cover what we aren't offering to make sure employers are equipped for success.

Tony Niknejad: That's great to hear. I'll reach out to the staff on this. We have a program that we're trying to encourage more participation. The Tennessee Small Business Relief Program provides grants for businesses that have been impacted by the stay-at-home order in April and I'll work with the team here at Labor and Workforce and push some more information down to you and your colleagues on the other local boards.

Mr. Woody: Thank you.

Rhonnie Brewer: I just wanted to highlight the amount of transition that this board has undertaken since Kyla has been at the helm of this board. There was a small window of time right before Kyla arrived when they were in jeopardy of losing control of their local area. There's just being a huge amount of improvement in the work that's coming out of our Local Workforce Development Agency and I look forward to seeing what they will be able to do. When I show up in an online conference and prior to COVID in an in-person conference there's always a representative from the greater Memphis area in that meeting. I am just encouraged because I remember what this area was like prior so I just wanted to say congratulations and keep up the great work.

Chairman Berry: Ronnie thank you great comments and hopefully encouragement to Greater Memphis and hopefully you will pass this on to the team there.

Ms. Guyette: I just want to point out a couple of things that we promised the board just about a year ago that we have done. We have formed a nonprofit agency to serve as our fiscal agent. That was quite the undertaking to move out of Shelby County government and into a standalone 501c3 so that has happened. We also have established our network of access points so right now we have 10 access points throughout our four-county area where participants can receive Title I services outside the four walls of the AJC and we are planning to do another 20 more this upcoming program year.

Chairman Berry: Fantastic - thanks for that update. I remember you saying that in previous presentations so appreciate hearing the update and seeing the results of your efforts.

Chairman Berry noted a vote abstention for Ron Wade because of his involvement with this local board. He asked for a motion to approve the plan for the Greater Memphis LWDA with the conditions they have addressed. It was moved by Greg Persinger and seconded by Jay Baker. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken with the abstention noted above with no opposition or additional abstentions. The plan for the Greater

Memphis LWDA was approved as presented with the conditions.

MIDDLE TN Region Selina Moore – Senior Regional Director
(Plan Review Recommendation: Fully Approved)

Ms. Moore made the following comments:

Middle Tennessee was making great strides including setting up our Regional Planning Council and subcommittees and then COVID hit. On our state board we still have some of the same members that looked at our plan from last year so I think you will see a big difference in last year's plan and this year's plan.

Regarding what we are proud of, one of the main comments that we got from state board members last year was our plan read like it was three separate areas. In this plan we're a more cohesive unit with a lot of regional strategies that we put in the plan. Of course, across-the-board there was a decrease in enrollments. The only uptick we have seen lately is in our dislocated worker numbers. One of the original projects that we had taken on this time is to develop a regional rapid response team.

One of the things that does concern us is the level of business engagement. We had to refer to local board members when we were putting this plan together because the business engagement was just not there at the time due to COVID. Our board members and partners really helped us develop this plan and I hope you found that we are more regionally minded than we were when we turned in our plan for last year.

Chairman Berry asked for a motion to approve the plan for the Middle TN Region as presented. He noted a vote abstention for Christine Hopkins because she is a member of the Southern Middle LWDA in this region. It was moved by Rhonnie Brewer and seconded by Vonda McDaniel. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken with the abstention noted above with no opposition or additional abstentions. The plan for the Middle TN Region was approved as presented.

Northern Middle LWDA – Marla Rye, Executive Director
(Plan Review Recommendation: Approved with Conditions)

Ms. Rye made the following comments:

I hope those who got to watch our plan video saw the passion that we have for Workforce Development in Northern Middle Tennessee. I was very proud of the fact that we had two County Mayors in our video along with the CLEO, the chairman of the Northern Middle Board and three additional board members who shared with you the successes that we are experiencing in Northern Middle.

However, I will say it has been painful the last four or five months with COVID-19.

Regarding our Title I program the month of April is when we were hardest hit with a 75% enrollment reduction. May was a little bit better with at 50% reduction. Overall, in the last seven months comparing it with 2019 our adult program has been reduced by about 23%, dislocated worker is 13% behind where we were in 2019 and 15% on youth. Our Title II Adult Education program has had about a 50% reduction in service levels and one of the questions in the plan was about the IELC component and we have two providers: NICE and a consortium of the Rutherford County school system and Workforce Essentials. As a non-profit we have applied for part of the \$150 million of CARES Act funding to provide a laptop for all our adult education and IELC students.

Our Title III program has had a decrease as well but in Northern Middle we've had 275,000 new UI claims related to COVID so UI staff have been very busy answering thousands of telephone calls. Title IV VR partners have had a 31% decrease in applications and a 39% decline in employment outcomes. TANF partners have had an overall 42% reduction in their caseload. We only have 700 cases and that covers 60 counties.

One of the things that I'm extremely concerned about is our 9.9% unemployment rate which is 102,000 people who are unemployed. What's more concerning is over 71,000 individuals have dropped off or drop out of the labor force and employers are already scrambling to find employees so that reduction in the labor force is a significant hit for us.

Chairman Berry: Marla would you say that the reduction is people leaving your region or just saying who are done trying?

Ms. Rye: I think it's people who have said "I'm out of it and I'm just not going to be in the labor force anymore" and a drop off the rolls. I don't think that we're having a lot of folks leave the region - we're not seeing that - and believe me sir we've got plenty of jobs available for all individuals that want to work.

I so appreciate Dr. Lovett and Mr. Roberson taking the time to review our plan with me this week. Improving our youth program is something actually the workforce board has already started working on and we are right now formulating a robust services model for in-school an out-of-school youth delivery. We want to procure an a-la-carte kind of plug and play model that will allow for multiple youth service providers to bid on delivering meaningful youth services. Procurement is already underway, the proposals will be due in this fall, and we have a start date of January 1, 2021. I appreciate all the work that Carla and Nakeisha have done on developing our youth programs. We will be glad to report to you quarterly on how we're implementing these new strategies and new providers.

Chairman Berry: I appreciate you addressing that and appreciate your perspective that it's not a personal issue or anything against that board for calling out conditions. I appreciate your perspective that it's a chance for us to constantly improve. Thank you for looking at it that way thank you for addressing those conditions. It sounds like you have some good things in place to get that approved under those conditions.

Marshall Graves: On this labor force reduction do we have any capacity to see more broadly like demographics: age, business sector for areas within the region to understand these numbers? I mean clearly we have this impact of COVID but is there any way to see in more granular detail generally across the whole state not necessarily for this particular region?

Ms. Rye: I think that's a very good question and I think it's something that if we do have the ability to dive into that then we can use that as a recruitment tool to address and maybe bring some of these people into the labor force. I don't know if anyone from the WIRED unit that develops these numbers and produces the unemployment rates are on the call that might be able to address if we can get more granular information on that.

Commissioner McCord: That's a great question and we will take that offline and Marla that's exactly where we'll go but we'll look to see what we can find especially labor participation and who the folks are that are potentially leaving so we've got that one as homework.

Chairman Berry: I do acknowledge that Rhonnie put in the comments here we do appreciate the energy and creativity that you guys put in your video presentation and it brought some fun and levity to the presentation. I would say that it made just a little bit choppy and so I had a hard time following some of the information that you were trying to convey. It was probably more an editing thing than a content thing so keep up the creativity with just a little bit more content but not as choppy - thank you for submitting that way it was fun.

Lakecia Peterson: I'm the TANF program director and wanted to add some perspective to what Marla mentioned about the TANF numbers decreasing. It's not that everyone is no longer receiving TANF but work eligible participants have been given short-term exemption due to being unable to participate in some type of job search or employment because of COVID so that's where that decreased number is coming from. It's not necessarily that they're no longer on our TANF rolls but they're exempt from having to do that 30-hour job requirement.

Chairman Berry: Thank you for that clarification.

Jay Baker: I want to thank Marla for addressing that issue of the Innovative English Literacy and Civics Education program. I just want to put this out there for other local board members who may have large immigrant populations to be considering. We do put out close to a million dollars across the state for serving the immigrant population particularly getting them on a fast-track to pathways in training and employment. In Northern Middle we have almost a half million dollars there and from our census calculations about 60,000 or more immigrants in the Northern Middle area, so I just encourage all the local areas to consider that opportunity.

Chairman Berry asked for a motion to accept the plan for the Northern Middle LWDA as presented with conditions. It was moved by Ben Ferguson and seconded by Greg Persinger. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken with no opposition or abstentions. The plan for the Northern Middle LWDA was approved as presented with those conditions.

[Southern Middle LWDA – Wendi Jones, Executive Director](#)
(Plan Review Recommendation: [Approved with Conditions](#))

Ms. Jones made the following comments:

We are proud of our regionalism and our efforts in apprenticeship: we've had three new apprenticeships in the pandemic again and we're looking at pre-apprenticeships right now.

Our customer service provider was able to continue as normal after the pandemic hit. The team and partners work virtually and continue to serve our customers as normal. What we need from our board is more employer engagement: what type of training do our employers need, what type of credentialing do we need which is tied back to the new grant directed toward short-term training and credentials.

Some of the questions from the board centered around our youth program. In Southern Middle we work closely with the high schools, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, adult education, community colleges, and TCATs to provide WIOA information to assist the youth with barriers. Some of the activities provided by Southern Middle include tutoring and post-secondary education training opportunities. Paid work experience which aligns the participants' educational and career goals provides opportunities for youth to gain on-the-job experience. Work experience provided by South Central Human Resource Agency, our customer service provider, offers short-term work opportunities for eligible youth with little or no work experience. Our employer partners provide of mentorship to these out-of-school youth also. The work experience includes developing positive work habits which improves communication and team building skills. We have a work experience program in a few of our high schools and it's working great. One of the things we've noticed during COVID is a decline in a lot of our enrollments. Our youth enrollment is something that continued to be steady. Southern Middle enrolled an estimated 50-55 youth. We're always looking for best practices around the state.

One of the questions was how the board will work toward a technology-driven intake system and process for all workforce partners in the area. Across the state we've developed a common intake form that is being piloted in the Southeast region right now. Once the tweaks are made we can start in this region as well. All our career advisors use Google Voice so anytime someone calls the local office it rolls right over to their telephone at home. Laptops were purchased for all staffs to use throughout COVID-19.

One of the concerns that was raised was the lack of broadband. We're excited about the Governor's Tennessee Emergency Broadband Grant we are hopeful that we will receive part of it. A lot of the school districts are using their school buses and parking them in the communities to use as hot spots.

One of the last questions is more details with coordinating strategies for the Title I adult program. As mentioned earlier we have three new apprenticeships since March and hopefully the third one, our culinary apprenticeship, will be approved by Monday. Consolidated business grants help our employers and we're excited about another funding opportunity with that – a RESEA expansion grant. We're going to help businesses and participants with that as well as providing training activities for adults and dislocated workers and assistance with resumes and supportive services.

Last year the first go-round our local plan was denied and so we really put a lot of time, thought, and effort into developing this local plan.

Chairman Berry: Yes thank you Wendy excellent progress on that. Thank you for acknowledging that in addressing some of the conditions that will get this plan approved. I know and appreciate you calling out the broadband and technology to rural areas and that continues to be a topic around the state. My guess is the reduction we are seeing is related to lack of access from a technology standpoint. We will continue to get that access out there to everybody in the state.

Chairman Berry asked for a motion to accept the plan for the Southern Middle LWDA as presented with conditions. It was moved by Marshall Graves and seconded by Martha Axford. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken. Christine Hopkins was an abstention since she is a Southern Middle board member. There was no opposition and there were no other abstentions. The plan for the Southern Middle LWDA was approved as presented with those conditions.

[Upper Cumberland LWDA - Becky Hull, Executive Director](#) (Plan Review Recommendation: [Fully Approved](#))

Ms. Hull made the following comments:

I want thank Dr. Lovett and his staff as we went through the process of writing this plan. I'm very grateful for the assistance that they provided to us and I also wanted to thank my colleagues for being such a tremendous support system.

We are proud of how we have served our employers and how we have served our participants. Regarding our employers we sent out a survey in partnership with the Highlands Economic Partnership which is a consortium of counties. Two of the main questions were how the government relief funding was affecting their ability to retain employees that may have been furloughed once they resumed operations and how many employees did they anticipate hiring once their businesses reopen. This feedback prompted us to look at ways to serve our employers. We had our first virtual job fair in light of some of the needs employers had and we are very busy planning our first drive-through job fair sometime early in September. We have six employers who have signed on to participate in the drive-thru job fair and we're excited to see how that turns out.

Regarding serving our participants, we leveraged a portion of our supportive services policy where the board gives the executive director the ability to give exception to policy on a case-by-case basis. This is especially important as we work with Carla Garrett. We had many participants who found themselves forced to complete their courses virtually but had no laptop to be able to do so. We have provided more than 40 laptops for our participants

Last you asked how serving participants has changed during the pandemic. Like everyone else we've seen a downturn in participants walking through the door, however we have really been on the front lines with over 600 calls a day from UI participants. I have received many calls on my personal cell phone along with my County Mayors and staff and it was a pleasure to serve those folks who were in need.

Chairman Berry: The other thing in your presentation that I appreciated was calling attention not only to COVID but also to the tornadoes that impacted your area which created a double dose of issues in your area. Also, it seems like you have a best practice of using the Google tool so if other board members think that would be useful you may give Becky a call. It sounds like you stayed well connected through all of this by utilizing that tool.

Chairman Berry asked for a motion to approve the plan for the Upper Cumberland LWDA as presented. It was moved by Ben Ferguson and seconded by Martha Axford. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none,

the vote was taken with no opposition or abstentions. The plan for Upper Cumberland was approved as presented.

EAST TN Region - Virginia Housley, Senior Regional Director
(Plan Review Recommendation: Fully Approved)

Ms. Housley made the following comments:

As everyone else has said our numbers are down due to COVID-19. I want to commend our staff that handled 27,321 UI calls in the past four months.

As we worked on our regional plan, we had the best collaboration of all of our partners across our region. I want to thank our Regional Directors and Executive Directors for making this happen. I'm proudest of the fact that we have come together, established our committees and got our partners to serve at these regional committees which is going to make everyone more aware of our regional plan as well as our local plan.

We really appreciate all the support that the State Workforce board can give down to our locals. The environment has made us go virtual and for a lot of us we were not used to it, but we have developed that and have been able to implement to a certain extent. We are thankful to the state for implementing the electronic signature so our customers could get their processes signed faster.

I appreciate you looking at our video and your support in our areas as you help us continue to serve our customers. Thank you for pushing us to develop the best work for system here in the state of Tennessee.

Chairman Berry: Well stated, especially the comments about how the state is helping to advance technology to make things simpler for so many people.

Christine Hopkins: I just want to say to Virginia and Wendi from Southern Middle and all the regions to thank them for the services they are providing despite COVID. Thank you all so much.

Chairman Berry asked for a motion to approve the plan for the East TN Region as presented. He noted vote abstentions for Marshall Graves, Mayor Kevin Brooks, Martha Axford and Mayor E.L. Morton. It was moved by Ron Wade and seconded by Rhonnie Brewer. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken with the abstentions noted above with no opposition or additional abstentions. The plan for the East TN Region was approved as presented.

Southeast LWDA – Michele Holt, Executive Director
(Plan Review Recommendation: Fully Approved)

Ms. Holt made the following comments:

We have three questions that we need to respond to. We were asked to speak about how COVID is impacting the local area. It has obviously had a significant impact on the AJC traffic especially with the closures that we were all forced to do in March. The ability to pivot to virtual services was somewhat slower than we had hoped and the lack of access to immediate technology limited the ability of some of the case managers to provide a vast array of services from an alternate workstation.

We were able to work through that and during the last five months UI has been at the forefront of most AJC Services which has limited the ability of staff to focus on other activities that are part of a full-service AJC. We had a 1400% increase in call volume so it was a lot for all the staff to have to manage. All of our AJCs are currently open, and COVID-19 has created the same staffing issues for the AJCs as all other business and industry sectors. It is difficult to operate full-service centers without the ability to maintain adequate staffing that can be caused by positive test results or quarantine requirements.

However, the most positive impact has been our virtual services and innovative approaches that we've been able to implement. I think many government programs have been slower to implement new technologies and a lot of this can be directly connected to shrinking budgets, slower policy implementation, and policy restrictions on many levels. We've all started to look at those and to try to make positive changes and that's what I can see as a plus. I'm pleased to hear that there's been a \$2 million investment set aside with CARES Act funding to help expand the virtual AJC and I think this has the potential to be a game-changer for some of our rural communities as long as our Broadband capability allows us to push out those services.

One of the things that I'm most proud of in our local plan is the Grundy County welding program that we highlighted, Economic and Community Development's ThreeStar program, the Grundy County High School, Chattanooga State Community College and the Grundy County Sheriff's Department with Sheriff Shrum. Sheriff Shrum and Mayor Brady were both instrumental and coming together to make sure that we had what we needed to push those Services. We had 25 trainees last year that attended training at the high school welding lab, 14 of those received AWS certification in welding and the last seven that went through were a cohort of inmates from the Grundy County jail and they all passed to receive their certification. We want to continue and expand these types of partnerships especially in our rural communities.

One of the needs I think from Southeast for the State Workforce board would be a continued support from

the state level in the shared visions across all departments and to provide more technical assistance to the regions and locals on how we all work together and grow our talent pipeline. One mission and one message is critical to eliminating silos and focusing on the real true need which is to develop our talent pipeline.

Chairman Berry: Thank you Michele appreciate that. I had one comment: in your presentation you talked about creating a dashboard with numbers and this isn't just for you. A lot of presentations talked about establishing KPIs and so on. One thing I would ask not only of you but of all the presentations that have said that is just make sure that when we're showing numbers that we're not just showing quantities that we have some sort of comparison: comparison to the goals or comparison to the previous year, etc. A lot of times we just see the number and if it's not with some sort of the comparison then it doesn't tell the full story that we're probably looking for. I'd like to make that request for every region that will be updating us with KPIs. I also want to point out if you haven't noticed in the chat that Deputy Commissioner Thomas has provided a link for us so that we can see reports every month by county so make sure you keep that link available.

Christine Hopkins: Comment to Michele – way to go Michele on the welding program. That's what we're hoping to see statewide that some of these things started to develop into some skill-building training program so thank you so much.

Marshall Graves: Chairman as a member of that group of course I would cheerlead for their engagement. It's just been really fantastic and being from South Cumberland Plateau the work that's being done in Grundy County is very much appreciated so thank you Michele and your whole team.

Ms. Holt: We've had a couple calls already about expanding and hope to reach out to Bledsoe County next time. Christine Hopkins: TCATs around the state can provide that service and are more than willing to do so. That is something that we hopefully could implement statewide.

Chairman Berry asked for a motion to approve the plan for the Southeast LWDA as presented. He noted vote abstentions for Marshall Graves and Mayor Kevin Brooks. It was moved by Christine Hopkins and seconded by Ben Ferguson. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken with the abstentions noted above with no opposition or additional abstentions. The plan for the Southeast LWDA was approved as presented.

[East LWDA – Bill Walker, Executive Director](#)
(Plan Review Recommendation: [Fully Approved](#))

Mr. Walker made the following comments:

One thing we are proud of is our strong workforce activities across Governor Lee's key priorities: rural and economic development, criminal justice reform, and vocational and workforce development.

Regarding rural economic development, in our sixteen counties, eight of our counties are distressed or at-risk which means we have more distressed or at-risk counties than any other LWDA and on an annual \$8 million budget we're spending \$3 million dollars a year in those eight counties. In those eight counties we are able to offer rural transportation services.

Regarding criminal justice reform, the Morgan County Correctional Facility is a Tennessee Department of Correction 2,300 bed prison maximum-security prison. We've worked with our Tennessee Board of Regents partners to offer instruction behind the bars in welding technology, building technology and information technology. In our local jails WIOA Title II adult education is all 16 county jails and WIOA Title III and Title IV (i.e. vocational rehabilitation) are in many of our jails as well.

Regarding vocational and workforce development, we've been able to work with our local high schools and our Career & Tech Ed programs especially in Cocke County and Grainger County where WIOA Title IV clients receive pre-ETS work-based learning opportunities as part of their high school curriculum. We met or exceeded all of our federal performance targets and we are expanding our American Job Center footprint in the coming year to place an AJC in the Morgan County Correctional Facility, the first AJC in a Tennessee Department of Corrections facility. We are also driving down the AJC into our high schools with placement in Cobb County and in Union County high schools which are both in distressed or at-risk counties.

We answered over 43,650 UI calls in the last 3 months. In Title II, they were incapacitated to a certain degree because they didn't have internet but they got innovative and started sending out packets to students who were then able to be engaged in their studies for their high school equivalency test.

About a year ago we received a report from Ernst and Young and in the East they gave 21 concrete recommendations to drive improvement and workforce development activities. We've just developed a local plan and I do applaud the department on giving us more time to do that. I'd like to see us address the Ernst & Young plan in the East area and I need some help from the State Workforce board and the Workforce Services team.

Chairman Berry: Thank you and request noted.

Chairman Berry asked for a motion to approve the plan for the East LWDA as presented. He noted vote abstentions for Martha Axford and Mayor E.L. Morton. It was moved by Ben Ferguson and seconded by Brandi Foust. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken with the abstentions noted above with no opposition or additional abstentions. The plan for the East LWDA was approved as presented.

Northeast LWDA – Kathy Pierce, Executive Director
(Plan Review Recommendation: Fully Approved)

Ms. Pierce made the following comments:

I'd like to recognize the input of our Regional Director Mr. Brian Decker. He participated in the original and revised plans as well as the work up for the presentations and I am grateful to him for the work that he has done.

We did have a change in our clients served due to COVID which has already been mentioned. We shifted to answering 27,321 requests for UI assistance from April 1 to August 21. There was also a shift in training methodologies: 91% of the training institutions in our area closed or cancelled classes and went primarily to online education which for some participants created a barrier because they lacked the technology to access the training especially when we were forced to close the AJCs and then later opened them only to appointments. We thought our rural area would likely avoid the spikes in the COVID transmission but unfortunately that did not work out and we have moved to the red zone.

These issues continue to impact our schools' ability to return what the new normal might be. Our rural initiatives have been negatively impacted. We had a plan in place with the TCAT in Morristown, the Rogersville branch of that to work with Hancock County to stand up a high school evening program for adults in welding that was put on hold. We have already reached out to Ivan [Greenfield] to request permission for a reprogramming of our rural initiative money. School closures also impacted a lot of the work that we were doing with the Career and Technical Education directors.

Another challenge for us involves parents who have to remain at home because their children are not in school or they can't go back to work because they may have lost their childcare. One of the needs we have is to put together the resources to provide additional childcare facilities.

We are proud of being able to mirror the state model regarding partner collaboration, engagement, information exchange, and dedication to the mission of the AJCs among all the partners on those weekly calls that has been phenomenal. We are also proud of our rapid response effort: we had an 800% increase in the number of WARN notices that we received and were able to move quickly to virtual mechanisms for assisting employers and the individuals who were being dislocated. We are evaluating the makeup of our rapid response team and have added additional partners to that group.

In terms of what we need I would begin by saying thank you to Dr. Lovett for his weekly calls. We need that philosophy that he employs in terms of listening to the issues that we face on a daily basis and doing his very best to provide a solution. We are grateful for the opportunity to have some CARES funding for new incumbent worker training programs which are always very successful in our area. We need additional technical assistance around the use of virtual technologies that others have mentioned.

Virtual job fairs have been scheduled in our areas and employers are asking us for the ability to interview the candidates immediately. I want to give a shout out to the Department of Labor staff and partner staff who have been working so diligently in the AJCs during this difficult time and we appreciate the work that Rusty [Felts] and his team have done.

In Title I we saw a 34% decrease from April 1 to August 21. Title II saw a 60% decrease and Title III a 35% decrease. SNAP Employment and Training had a 40% increase year-over-year. Title IV had a 53% decrease and TANF an 8% decrease. I have three pages of bullet points but I will stop here. Thank you for the opportunity to request approval of our plan.

Chairman Berry: Kathy, it's evident that you guys are doing good work and I would encourage anybody to reach out to her and get those bullet points to see what else is going on in their area.

Chairman Berry asked for a motion to approve the plan for the Northeast LWDA as presented. It was moved by Martha Axford and seconded by Ben Ferguson. The motion was opened for discussion and hearing none, the vote was taken with no opposition or abstentions. The plan for the Northeast LWDA was approved as presented.

Closing Remarks and Adjourn

Chairman Berry thanked everyone for their time and attention. The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:02 p.m.

Note: An audio recording of this meeting is on file at the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development. All meeting minutes and dates are provided on the State Workforce Development Board website.



Tim Berry, Chairman
State Workforce Development Board

11-17-20

Date

11/16/20