



Massachusetts Workforce Association Public Policy Committee Meeting Notes

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

Notes -

Introductions

- Participants: Mary Sarris, Ron Iacobucci, Joe Peters, Robert Bower, Rebecca Bialecki, Teri Anderson, Raija Vaisanen, Kathlween Weislein, Lisa Vermette, Karen Pelletier, Tonja Mettlach, Raija Vaisanen, and Chris Andresen (guest)

Committee Check-In:

- We welcomed a new member, Lisa Vermette, Director of Workforce Development and Adult Learning at Greater Lawrence Community Action Council, Inc.

State and Federal Policy Updates

- Tonja provided an end of session update on what bills passed, including the economic development legislation. For a more in depth review see MWA's [blog](#). In addition, Tonja shared that there is new leadership in the House and asked Ron to give an update on the new speaker, Ron Mariano.
- Raija provided an update on MWA's work federally with the National Skills Coalition and the Workforce Solutions Group. In December, Raija joined NSC and WSG for meetings with Lynch's office and McGovern.
- Bob shared about the new administration and how in this virtual world it would be pretty easy for us to reach out and suggest more forums on sharing best practices, bringing together people from all over the country. Suggested we also reach out to Chris Andresen about how we can get DOL to start doing more of these cross-state sharing.
- Mary shared some thoughts about how the CTI initiative is going on the ground. They are in the middle of recruiting and finding it hard to recruit because people can't envision themselves going out to training. A big issue is they can't see themselves leaving their homes and their children. When schools reopen this might make it easier.
 - Committee talked about setting up a call with Senator Lewis to discuss the childcare issues. Tonja will reach out to his office.
 - Teri shared that they are seeing similar issues in her region. Slots are reduced and affordability is still an issue. Overall the number of providers is really challenging.

FY22 Budget

- The committee discussed the FY22 budget season which will be commencing shortly. Last session pushed for \$10M, was able to get \$5M, which in this economy was great. We attribute our success to Senator Comerford and finding a real workforce champion.
- Tonja asked the committee for thoughts around the career center line item. Should we push for \$10M again even if that number is not possible? Should we use another number?
- Tonja will share a chart with the line item proposal from the Workforce Solutions Group. If any committee member has thoughts on the career center line item, **please send them to Tonja by January 31st at the latest.**

- MWA will also provide collateral in February to assist local areas in their advocacy efforts around the budget.

D.C. Federal Update - *Guest Speaker Chris Andresen (joining at 2:30)*

- Chris joined the group to talk about what he is seeing in D.C. in terms of workforce.
- New stimulus package but out by Biden -
 - Process wise need to keep in mind the narrow margins in the House and Senate (tied in Senate). Chris has seen a distinction between rescue and recovery. Workforce is in the recovery bucket and Biden's plan is in the rescue bucket so not surprising there is no workforce money.
 - The hope is that the Senate could pass something that is bipartisan but don't know that they can.
- Biggest advice from Chris: talk to your senators/house members (1) describe the economy on the ground; (2) what you have been doing throughout the pandemic; (3) what has been working; (4) and why you need funding now. Connect our issues to covid and your argument and advocacy will be in a much better position.
- Ron asked a question on system changes. Are people talking about big changes to the system? Chris' position is that is the discussion for another day.
- Kathleen- what can we be doing that is outside the box? What haven't we tapped yet. We need to think differently.
- Teri shared about what is really needed is a functional and responsive UI system. Also sees that people are afraid to go back to work and businesses might have to start doing more in order to reassure employees that workplaces are safe.

Public Policy Framework/Campaign

- **Workforce campaign.** MWA in initial conversations with colleagues about raising the profile of workforce development in our state and producing a document aimed at using data and framing the problem COVID has produced and presenting policy solutions for an equitable recovery. We are in talks to get this report funded and hire an outside entity to help produce it (colleagues involved include JVS and WSG). We would also schedule virtual stakeholder engagement sessions to get feedback and input, which MWA would likely lead.
- Feedback requested:
 - Does the committee support this type of effort? What would you want MWA to focus on or stress about your work during the pandemic.
- **MWA Framework** - Tonja will follow up with some initial ideas around a workforce agenda framework for MWA. Areas of focus could include: (1) an equitable recovery from COVID; (2) sufficient funding for the public workforce system; (3) childcare and other workforce supportive services; (4) quality jobs initiative (just using this name for now); and (5) more flexible regulations and longer funding streams.
 - Feedback requested:
 - We will spend the next committee meeting on this topic. Share any ideas, frameworks, etc. you have before the next meeting.