



**Massachusetts Workforce Association
2021/2022 Legislative Agenda**

The Massachusetts Workforce Association (MWA) is a statewide membership association that leads, advocates, and convenes on behalf of the Massachusetts workforce system. We provide a unified voice for the state's regionally-led workforce development system to ensure it is responsive to the dynamic demands of businesses, job seekers, incumbent workers, and youth throughout the Commonwealth.

The effects of COVID-19 on the workforce system, the people it serves, and our economy has been devastating. Since March 2020 over 1.9 million individuals in Massachusetts have experienced an employment interruption and almost 250,000 individuals will not have jobs to return to. Over the next two years, MWA will work with members, workforce system partners, employers, and appointed and elected officials to advocate for the policies and resources needed to meet the talent needs of local businesses and connect job seekers to employment and career pathways.

MWA's priority areas of focus will all be considered using a racial equity and inclusion lens and include:

Responsive and Fully Funded Public Workforce System: The public workforce system is a network of federal, state and local entities that work together to provide education and training services to jobseekers and skilled talent to businesses to support economic strength and competitiveness. MWA advocates for policies and funding to ensure the workforce system can adequately respond to the unique needs of their diverse customers. Specifically MWA advocates for:

- Fully funding the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act at the federal level and state funding for workforce development programs.
- Consistent and adequate funding for MassHire Career Centers to ensure the "front line" of the workforce system has sufficient funding to successfully serve jobseekers and employers, no matter the economic environment.
- An integrated data system that enables workforce professionals to effectively share and manage programs and performance/outcomes with partners and stakeholders, and that supports job matching capabilities across the Commonwealth.
- Training and professional development opportunities for workforce professionals that incorporates and promotes trauma-informed, DEI and other evidence-based practices in their work with jobseekers and businesses.

Innovation, Training, and Apprenticeship: Everyone in the Commonwealth should have access to

education and skills training opportunities to help ensure better jobs for individuals and economic growth for employers. MWA advocates for training and apprenticeship programs in order to meet the current and future needs of our state's employers. Specifically, MWA advocates for:

- Scaling up and ensuring long-term and adequate funding for proven job training programs
- Expanding apprenticeship, with a particular focus on women and people of color, and non-traditional occupations, as a way to create a diverse workforce and pipelines.
- Understanding and responding to the role of technology and its impact on the way people work, the skills needed to enter and advance in the labor market, and the current and future training and education needs of the state's workforce.
- Leverage new learning technologies to offer greater opportunities to businesses and job seekers across the state.
- Continue to support and expand the state's support for life-long learning, including making sure that all residents have affordable access to the training and education they need to keep up with the rapid pace of industry change.

Supports for Overcoming Barriers to Employment: It is difficult to enter training and educational programs when struggling to meet basic needs including housing, child care, food, among other important necessities. Having robust public assistance programs helps support people who want to train for jobs with better wages and advancement opportunities. MWA is committed to strengthening worker supports as a way to ensure everyone has the opportunity to reskill and retrain for new careers. Specifically MWA advocates for:

- Fully funded and well functioning unemployment insurance system designed to support workers when they lose their jobs and complement workforce system efforts to help people get back to work.
- Programs and policies that promote economic mobility and opportunities for all.
- Flexible funding for and increased access to critical supports that make job training possible (including child care, transportation, housing, food, and unemployment insurance).
- Expanding digital inclusion efforts by increasing access to affordable broadband, investing in high quality professional development, and ensuring everyone has access to digital devices.
- Promoting collaboration and partnerships with state agencies to mitigate cliff effects.
- Increasing funding for and access to learn and earn training programs.

Employer Engagement and Partnerships: It is critical that education and workforce systems align to and meet the needs of employers. MWA works with employers and the workforce system to ensure a pipeline of future workers who have the skills that align with the current and future needs of employers. Specifically, MWA advocates for:

- Supporting sector partnerships between employers and the workforce development system to ensure responsive and coordinated services for employers.
- Encourage and educate employers who employ low-wage workers to consider implementing practices that both improve productivity, employee retention and job quality.
- Increasing awareness of and engagement with the MassHire workforce system.