



## County of Mercer Workforce Development Board

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Christian Estevez  
WDB Director

Dan Benson  
County Executive

Keith Secrest  
Chairperson

### WDB Quarterly Committee ♦ Chairperson: Keith Secrest

**August 12, 2025** (Rescheduled from July 29, 2025)

♦ 12:00 p.m. ♦ Zoom Meeting Minutes

#### In Attendance

**Keith Secrest, Chair** (Kinetics Industries); **Scott Elliot** (Disabilities Chair); **Melissa Tenzer** (CEO Dress for Success); **Anthony Carabelli** (Economic Development); **Ray Agliata** (Literacy Chair)

**WDB/ MCOTES Staff:** Chiara Tramo, Frank Stillitano, Shanele Gooch, Eddie Roberts, Lauren Washington

#### Welcome & Introductions

Keith Secrest opened the meeting at 12:10 p.m. and everyone introduced themselves before getting started.

#### Review and approval of April 29, 2025 Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Melissa & seconded by Scott Elliot.  
Motion passed and the minutes were approved.

#### MCOTES/ WDB

- ✓ ITA updates: There are 15 contracts in place and only one is waiting for completion.
- ✓ USDOL Comprehensive On-site Review is still in process
- ✓ Annual Contract Monitoring: A more collaborative approach to conducting audits has been developed by the team and is expected to occur in the first week of August. The aim is also to ensure contract requirements are being met and that customers receive the highest quality of service possible

#### Sumer Youth Work Experience Program:

Summer Youth Work Experience Program has placed over 150 students on more than 40 sites throughout Mercer County. Work is currently underway to process payroll for all students, with their first payday approaching. Feedbacks are very positive and there's a clear plan to expand the program in the future. The team is exploring the adoption of a two-cohort model, similar to the county's intern program. This model would involve college students starting earlier (as their academic year ends sooner) followed by high school students, aiming to prevent the loss of youth who might otherwise start later in the season. Melissa suggested offering vouchers from Dress for Success and the Father Center to interns, allowing them to acquire professional attire either during or after their internship. Eddie strongly supported this idea ("yes and yes"), and Melissa plans to coordinate with the Father Center for this initiative. This has been a successful collaboration in previous years, with many interns taking advantage of it.

#### One Stop Operator:

The One Stop is continuing its efforts to be out in the public, gaining more and more traction, which is leading to more individuals coming through their doors. In the past quarter, they have increased their community engagement efforts, which facilitates the public coming in. They have deepened their relationship with the College of New Jersey. This relationship has progressed to a point where the college sees the benefits and may potentially serve as a space donor

for next year. While no guarantees, the college seems receptive to the idea. If materialized, this would make it easier to facilitate job readiness trainings and end-of-year events by providing donated space. They are in the process of formalizing a reciprocal services relationship with Anchor House. Eddie is particularly interested in partnering with Anchor House for their soft skills training. They are currently planning for their fall job fair, which will be a collaboration with the Juvenile Justice Commission (for justice-involved individuals) and the county's personnel department.

- The goal of combining resources is to create bigger, more impactful events.
  - New Strategy for Fairs: They are shifting from just sitting at tables. They plan to staff tables minimally while the rest of the designated team will be out mixing and mingling on the floor. This new approach aims to drive individuals to their table and talk to potential employers to form relationships, thereby bolstering their portfolio of potential employers for direct outreach.
- Continuous Outreach: Eddie and Christian continue to be "out in the streets" talking to people and trying to increase relationships with various organizations.

### **Committee Reports:**

#### ❖ Disability Issues Committee:

Scott presented the Disability report which emphasized referring students who disclose or may have a disability to DVR (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation) or the Progressive Center for extra support, particularly in pre-employment transition skills. This year, three youth have been referred to DVR. There is a close, reciprocal working relationship between the Progressive Center and DVR. Scott noted their success with DVR-funded pre-employment support, providing "good quality time for the students". A challenge involves the scheduling conflicts of Leslie Jack, the Mercer DVR office manager, who is a "key player". A proposed proclamation for October was mentioned, Disability Awareness Employment Month, which they seek support for from the county and Dan Benson. The discussion also briefly touched upon broader hiring challenges, especially in manufacturing, which Keith confirmed has worsened, affecting smaller businesses disproportionately due to issues like youth exodus and undocumented workers.

#### ❖ Literacy Committee:

Ray Agliata is the newly appointed chair. He is also new to the Workforce Development Board. In his "day job," Ray serves as the Manager of Community Education and Training at Mercer County Community College. A significant development for the committee is that with Ray now in position as chair, they can mobilize forward on getting their reading program back mobilized through the daycare centers. Keith noted that getting Ray in place was the "big thing" for the committee.

More detailed information about the committee's progress will be discussed at the upcoming quarterly meeting.

#### ❖ Advanced Manufacturing Committee:

Scott noted that the sector is experiencing a "summer low" due to schools being out. Despite the summer lull, attendance at the vocational school is "way up," indicating strong engagement there. There have been "attendance issues" with community colleges. The committee seems to have lost a connection with the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program (NJMEP), as they haven't been attending meetings recently. Re-establishing this contact is a priority before the August meeting. Hiring and finding qualified individuals remains a "major issue" in the manufacturing world, and Keith confirmed it has "gotten even worse".

Reasons for Worsening Hiring Challenges:

- Youth exodus from New Jersey due to high housing costs.
- Issues related to undocumented workers, which create additional stresses and make it difficult to mobilize and train workers. These hiring difficulties "definitely disproportionately hurt the smaller businesses", more so than union or government-affiliated entities. There's hope for a change in rhetoric from the administration, with a possibility of looking at ways to "keep some of this workforce, get these good people to stay here and help us out". Keith is considering setting up a meeting with Congressman Kaine to discuss this issue, alongside the need for personal care assistant

❖ Health Care Committee:

Kathy retired and are looking to get a new Chair.

**Expenditures Updates:**

For the first time, the Workforce Development Board "pretty much spent it all the way down" for Program Year 2023, which closed on June 30th. This full expenditure was attributed to significant foresight from Chris and Eddie. As a direct result of fully expending the PY23 funds, the WDB received an "increase in the PY25 funding". Program Year 2024 is currently being addressed, with spending "just starting to hit that now," but a plan is in place for its expenditure. There is "a million dollars of ARPA funding" specifically allocated for economic development programs.

- This funding supports initiatives such as facade signage improvements and a business builder rebate grant program, which rebates eligible costs for businesses.
- Approximately \$300,000 of the \$1 million has been spent so far.
- The program is anticipated to be available for another "four to six months hopefully next year".

The US Department of Labor (USDOL) audit was cleared, bringing an end to a process that lasted a year and a half. Additionally, the single Mercer County single audit and the yearly state audit are both going smoothly and are close to completion. The planning for a wrap-up event for the summer youth program is "all budget driven", and options for venues and types of events are being explored based on available funds. They are looking into what is feasible given the budget and the large potential size of the group, which could exceed a thousand people if parents and youth attend.

**BUSINESS/ISSUES/ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

WDB is moving to the MCIA Building – 80 Hamilton Avenue, Trenton, NJ

Meeting adjourned at 1:35 p.m.

Next meeting: **October 28, 2025 at 12:00 p.m.-1:30 p. m.**