

MINUTES
ARKANSAS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
July 20, 2021

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board convened the Full Board meeting through electronic means on July 20, 2021, beginning at 10:05 a.m. The meeting was conducted in-person and remotely utilizing Zoom and teleconference. Chair Tom Anderson presided with the following members voicing their presence: Mr. Joseph Baxter, Mr. Len Blaylock III, Ms. Karen Breashears, Dr. Charisse Childers, Judge Brandon Ellison, Mr. Randy Finegan, Ms. Rebecca Ives, Ms. Erin Franks proxy for Mr. Johnny Key, Ms. Candice Lawrence, Mr. Brian Marsh, Ms. Bridgett Criner proxy for Dr. Trenia Miles, Mr. George “Gan” Nunnally, Mr. Kelley Sharp, Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes, Mr. Robert Thorne, and Dr. Diana Wright.

Mr. Scott Bull, Mr. Jeff Griffin, Ms. Melissa Hanesworth, Ms. Abby Houseworth, Mr. Alan Hughes, Ms. Holley Little, Dr. Maria Markham, Secretary Mike Preston, and Dr. Julie Roberson were unable to attend.

Chairman’s Opening Comments: Chair Anderson called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. upon seeing a quorum. Chair Anderson stated for the record the One-Stop Certification was previously tabled in April 2020, July 2020, October 2020, January 2021, April 2021, and July 2021 due to COVID-19 and will continue to be tabled with the hope to revisit this item in the October 2021 Full Board meeting. On March 30, 2021, Governor Asa Hutchinson’s extended State public health and disaster emergency via Executive Order 21-07 has expired. However, although the emergency has passed, we are still in a pandemic.

Governor’s Address: Governor Asa Hutchinson acknowledged Arnell Willis’ retirement as the Director of the State Workforce Development Board at Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (ADWS) and Chad Brown, who will be taking over as Director. Governor Hutchinson explained one of his top priorities is to grow the economy by providing high quality jobs in local communities. He addressed the concern of unemployment with the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for Arkansans to get back out into the workforce.

Report of Deputy Director: Chair Tom Anderson recognized Board Member and Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) Director, Dr. Charisse Childers, to address the Full Board. Dr. Childers announced the retirement of Ron Snead, who served with ADWS for 21 years, at the end of June 2021. Jay Bassett, the previous Division Chief of the Dislocated Workers Services Unit and Assistant Director of Grants Resource Administration, was selected as the new Deputy Director for External Operations. Dr. Childers also announced Courtney Traylor, who previously served as the Assistant Deputy Commissioner for the Arkansas Insurance Department and as the Chief Financial Officer for the Arkansas Department of Commerce, as the new Deputy Director of Internal Operation. Lastly, Dr. Childers announced the departure of Kris Jones as the Assistant Director of Office of Financial Management who will continue to be available on a part-time basis when needed.

Report of Board Director: Chair Tom Anderson recognized, Dr. Charisse Childers, and asked her to introduce Mr. Chad Brown. Mr. Chad Brown was appointed by the Governor as the new Board Director to the Arkansas Workforce Development Board, following Arnell Willis’ five years in the position. Board Director Brown addressed the importance and significance of the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in supporting and training the labor market for competing in the economy. Board Director Brown explained pre-pandemic the Arkansas unemployment rate was 3.9% and currently is at 4.4%. He expounded the impact of the 0.5% increase upon the State’s workforce.

Agenda Item 1 – ACTION – Minutes of the April 20, 2021, Full Board Meeting: Chair Tom Anderson asked if there were any additional corrections or revisions to the April 20, 2021, Full Board meeting minutes.

Hearing none, a motion to accept the April 20, 2021, Full Board meeting minutes with no corrections or revisions was made by Mr. Blaylock, followed by Mr. George Nunnally making the second motion. The motion carried unanimously with none opposed.

The following votes were recorded and voiced by Board Members on a roll vote to Approve, Disapprove, or Abstain for no vote: Mr. Joseph Baxter – Approve, Mr. Len Blaylock III – Approve, Ms. Karen Breashears – Approve, Mr. Scott Bull – Absent, Dr. Charisse Childers – Approve, Judge Brandon Ellison – Approve, Mr. Randy Finegan – Approve, Mr. Jeff Griffin – Absent, Ms. Melissa Hanesworth – Absent, Mr. Randy Henderson – Approve, Ms. Abby Houseworth – Absent, Mr. Alan Hughes – Absent, Ms. Rebecca Ives – Approve, Mr. Charles Johnson – Approve, Ms. Erin Franks proxy for Mr. Johnny Key – Approve, Ms. Candice Lawrence – Approve, Ms. Holley Little – Absent, Dr. Maria Markham – Absent, Mr. Brian Marsh – Approve, Ms. Bridgett Criner proxy for Dr. Trenia Miles – Approve, Mr. George Nunnally – Approve, Secretary Mike Preston – Absent, Dr. Julie Roberson – Absent, Mayor James Sanders – Approve, Mr. Kelley Sharp – Approve, Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes – Approve, Mr. Robert Thorne – Approve, and Dr. Diana Wright – Approve.

Report of Chairperson: Chair Anderson informed Board Members in March 2020 that he had been appointed to the Workforce Investment Advisory Council (WIAC), which is a national group of people providing recommendations to the Secretary of Labor. Chair Anderson explained WIAC investigates state funding for labor market information to fund the state workforce and labor market infrastructure. Chair Anderson addressed he has been monitoring the local boards through the internet and through Zoom. In meetings with Dr. Childers and Director Brown, Chair Anderson informed the Full Board of his thoughts on the State Board and working with the Governor’s office to ensure the Board is fully staffed. Lastly, Chair Anderson informed the Full Board of his and Director Brown’s attendance to the State Chairs and Liaisons in September 2020.

Report of Director: Chair Tom Anderson recognized Board Member and Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) Director, Dr. Charisse Childers to address the Full Board. Due to a brief delay during roll call from technical difficulties, Dr. Childers relinquished her five minutes for a report by stating her concerns were previously addressed.

Report of Staff: Chair Anderson recognized Board Staff Mr. Eddie Thomas to address the Full Board. Mr. Thomas stated the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services was the recipient of the Workforce Data Quality Initiative Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL). The \$2.5 million grant was awarded to help states increase the capacity of workforce development programs and improve the quality and range of workforce data. Through this grant, ADWS will work with the Division of Information Services (DIS) to analyze gaps between occupational demand and credential skills production by region, track progression across education and workforce systems into the labor market; analyze impacts of co-enrollment and wrap around services for case providers to analyze gaps, barriers, underserved populations, and inequities; evaluate system solutions; set system performance goals; and create policy incentives for innovation. Mr. Thomas added ADWS will apply for an additional grant through USDOL called “The Careers and Dislocated Worker Grant.” The grant regards comprehensive and assessable reemployment through equitable employment recovery. The goal of the grant is to help reemploy dislocated workers mostly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, specific to those from historically marginalized communities, groups, and those who have been unemployed for an extended period. The grant provides two opportunities: 1) to serve individuals through career services and training services; and 2) to develop or upgrade accessible online systems and platforms to adapt structures to assess job search and career guidance. Mr. Thomas

provided an update to the Full Board regarding the \$13.5 million Reimagine Grant from the U.S. Department of Education received by the Arkansas Workforce Development Board. ADWS is working with Shorter College and the University of Arkansas global campus to ensure they are providing short term workforce training to individuals affected by COVID-19. Mr. Thomas reported the Workforce Taskforce was developed in response to COVID-19. The Workforce Taskforce is comprised of individuals within ADWS, Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC), the Local Workforce Development Boards, and Area Operations Chiefs (AOC), to streamline efforts in stimulating the workforce on a statewide level. Mr. Thomas informed the Full Board a WIOA Partners' Meeting will be held on September 21-23, 2021, they will be hosting the WIOA partners meeting for members to share information, present, and discuss the directions of their programs. Mr. Thomas concluded USDOL has been hosting "Workforce Wednesday" to provide technical assistance to state and local area staff on resources available to job seekers and employers in addition to implementation of WIOA.

Report of Committees:

Since the first quarter of 2020, each of the Board's standing committees decided to discontinue Committee Meetings in support of the Governor's Executive Orders. However, a request was made in the second quarter of 2021 by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Committee Chair to discuss new initiatives.

TANF Oversight Committee Report:

TANF Committee Chair, Gan Nunnally, stated the committee met and approved the minutes of the January 7, 2020, committee meeting. The committee heard a report on the status of federal legislation and the impact on TANF funding. The report regarded the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to keep provisions to TANF and COVID-19. The committee heard a report on the TANF programs response to COVID-19. This included working with Department of Human Services (DHS) to streamline the application process using telephonic interviewing, improving online accessibility, and waiving new person requirements to perform work readiness assessments. An effort to provide support to Career Pathway Initiative (CPI) colleges to distribute computers, provide internet access, and equipment to support Transitional Employment Assistance (TEA) and TANF eligible students attending classes remotely was also provided. The committee also heard a report on program approved initiatives, the TANF Training Initiative, IT and cyber security training, a partnership with the Ford Institute, a report was provided on the TANF Dropout Prevention Initiative, and the Arkansas River Cooperative. Information was also provided on new training and job preparation initiatives from local workforce development boards. A detailed report will be provided to the Full Board at a later date. Lastly, the committee heard a report from two TANF partnerships, the Children's Advocacy Centers of Arkansas, and the Little Rock Workforce Development Board. These organizations shared how TANF funding has helped them expand and implement programs serving individuals and families in Arkansas. The next TANF Committee meeting is to be determined.

Agenda Item 2 – Action – Work Pays Eligibility Transition and Policy Update: Chair Anderson recognized Phil Harris to present to the Full Board. Mr. Harris explained a TANF committee meeting was held on May 11, 2021, to discuss policy changes. Revisions were made to incorporate eligibility policy for the administration of the Work Pays Program, as permitted by Act 514 of 2007. The revisions are as follows: **Policy 10101**, added language regarding Act 1205 of 2015, drug testing of applicants and recipients; **Policy 10102.4**, language added regarding Drug Screening Questionnaire requirement; **Policy 10102.5**, language added regarding scheduling the initial interview; **Policy 10102.6**, language added regarding re-scheduling the initial interview; **Policy 10103**, language added to require adequate notice of denial during initial eligibility determination; **Policy 10104**, added new language on drug testing requirements; **Policy 10104.1**, added new language regarding exemptions from drug screenings and testing; **Policy 10104.2**, added language regarding cooperation with drug testing; **Policy 10104.3**, added language regarding substance abuse evaluation/drug treatment referral; **Policy 10104.4**, added language regarding compliance with drug abuse treatment plan of action; **Policy 10104.5**, added language regarding good cause for noncompliance

with drug treatment/recovery support; **Policy 10105**, language added regarding biweekly contact; **Policy 10106**, added procedure for Drug Assessment Questionnaire; **Policy 10200**, language added outlining requirements for 6 month and yearly re-evaluations, examples and FPL calculations added, and language added to clarify significant change to budget; **Policy 10502**, language added to list types of acceptable verification; **Policy 10600**, language added to clarify eligibility for bonuses; **Policy 10600.4**, language added to require advance notice before closure and language added that temporary fluctuations in salary are not part of income calculations; **Policy 10740**, language added to explain sanction levels and home visit requirement; **Policy 10750**, language added about lifting the child support sanction; **Policy 10760**, language added regarding closure due to noncompliance with drug screening requirements; **Policy 10800**, language added to clarify when the six-month does not apply and note added to explain insufficient hours.

As presented with no revisions, a motion to accept the updates to the Work Pays Eligibility Transition and Policy inclusive of the Work Pays Application was made by Ms. Candice Lawrence followed by Ms. Bridgett Criner proxy for Dr. Trenia Miles making the second motion. The motion carried unanimously with none opposed.

The following votes were recorded and voiced by Board Members on a roll vote to Approve, Disapprove, or Abstain for no vote: Mr. Joseph Baxter – Approve, Mr. Len Blaylock III – Approve, Ms. Karen Breashears – Approve, Mr. Scott Bull – Absent, Dr. Charisse Childers – Approve, Judge Brandon Ellison – Approve, Mr. Randy Finegan – Approve, Mr. Jeff Griffin – Absent, Ms. Melissa Hanesworth – Absent, Mr. Randy Henderson – Approve, Ms. Abby Houseworth – Absent, Mr. Alan Hughes – Absent, Ms. Rebecca Ives – Approve, Mr. Charles Johnson – Approve, Ms. Erin Franks proxy for Mr. Johnny Key – Approve, Ms. Candice Lawrence – Approve, Ms. Holley Little – Absent, Dr. Maria Markham – Absent, Mr. Brian Marsh – Approve, Ms. Bridgett Criner proxy for Dr. Trenia Miles – Approve, Mr. George Nunnally – Approve, Secretary Mike Preston – Absent, Dr. Julie Roberson – Absent, Mayor James Sanders – Approve, Mr. Kelley Sharp – Approve, Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes – Approve, Mr. Robert Thorne – Approve, and Dr. Diana Wright – Approve.

Agenda Item 3 – Informational –Ready For Life 2021: Chair Anderson recognized Mr. Rick Neal, the Director of the Workforce Education and Data Transformation for the Governor’s office, to present information on the Ready For Life Initiative. Mr. Neal explained Ready for Life is designed to be a one workforce solution for the state that gives every Arkansan an opportunity to go somewhere they can find support finding a job and connect their education to it. Mr. Neal pleaded for the active participation of everybody for Ready for Life to be utilized to its maximum potential. Governor Hutchinson committed \$14.7 million from his discretionary fund to the project and said one of his long-term goals is for the state to be more efficient and connecting work skills and work certifications with employers. The project provides over \$4.5 million to two-year institutions to expand workforce training opportunities in high wage, high-demand careers for all Arkansans, according to state officials. State officials say the project provides three-primary resources to enhance education, workforce opportunities, and data driven decision making through a learning management system, statewide longitudinal data system and learner employer records. Mr. Neal explained a call to action to link up technology and education with a single workforce solution and the participation of everyone, so that Arkansans can be provided with skill and job readiness to be active in the labor market.

Candice Lawrence asked if the focus is on those who have already graduated high school, or maybe dropped out of high school, or is the focus on students who have yet to graduate high school, or is it a mix? Mr. Neal responded to a Board Member’s inquiry regarding the program’s focus on participant status, such as, students who have graduated, dropped out, or will graduate. He further explained the program targets everyone whether you’re in 8th grade or you’re 60 years old, it is a program meant to ready everyone for the workforce.

The program does not replace the ACT, National Career Readiness Certification (NCRC), etc., but works together in tandem. The targeted learning is configured by region based off need. Mr. Blaylock followed up and asked how businesses interact with the program. Mr. Neal explained everyone goes through the same type of interaction as everyone with the same opportunity.

A recommendation was made to hold a 30-minute training session for all the local workforce members within the state agencies on how to navigate the program and site. Dr. Childers suggested people may wonder how this will work with Arkansas Job Link (AJL) and how some might utilize both systems. Mr. Neal emphasized the programs are there to support each other rather than replace one another.

Agenda Item 4 – Informational – Act 319 of 2021 and Career Readiness Certification (CRC): Chair Anderson recognized Mr. Ross White, the Director of the Division of Career & Technical Education, to present information on Arkansas Act 319. This Act requires an Arkansas public school who serves a student in grades ten through twelve (10-12) shall administer college and career readiness assessments, including a career readiness assessment that leads to a nationally recognized work readiness certificate, as determined by the state board, to each student before he or she graduates from high school. The district can choose to have the certification readministered for whatever reason.

Dr. Childers stated how this will be more relevant and happen faster once jobs take the certification more seriously and state jobs make the certification necessary from potential employees.

Ms. Candice Lawrence raised a concern regarding the education of the business community with the actual value of the certificate. She believed there will be a challenge with making most employers take this kind of certificate seriously. Mr. White explained he will market the program to those within the educational side of the situation, and it will take his connections to members or commerce and the higher people up that can market the program to those in policy positions.

Chair Anderson recognized Ms. Jessica Caldwell, the ADWS Career Readiness Certificate Coordinator. Ms. Jessica Caldwell explained with the NCRC, an applicant shows to be job ready, posed the necessary job skills for today's labor market, which will streamline them to a job suited for them. The certifications do not expire and go into the ACT database, which can be pulled by any employer. Levels of this certification rank as bronze, silver, gold, and platinum.

Agenda Item 5 – Informational – Offender Re-entry: Chair Anderson recognized Mr. Jarrod Self, Housing Manager for Re-entry Services with Arkansas Community Correction, to present information related to his program. The Re-entry Program is a 6-month community-based program for select offenders within the Arkansas Department of Corrections that function within the community program. Mr. Self explained the type of barriers people with felonies face when seeking employment due to their criminal history. Mr. Self explained employers who are not second-chance employer prove to be a big challenge for getting ex-offenders back into the workforce. Housing and mental health also prove to be big challenges in navigating life after a felony conviction. There are 217 active participants across 7 facilities in the program. The program began in 2016 and has had 2,200 participants graduate to date. Graduates have all been full time employees in the communities. There are 66,772 total participants on some form of supervision in Arkansas inclusive of 21,820 participants who are full time employees; approximately 37,000 participants are on direct and active supervision; 2,139 participants are employed part-time; and 4,825 participants are considered disabled.

Board Open Discussion: Chair Anderson asked board members for any additional items for discussion. Hearing none, Chair Anderson opened the floor to allow the public the opportunity to speak before the Full Board.

Public Speaking Opportunity: Chair Anderson addressed members of the public attending the meeting through electronic means and extended the opportunity to speak before the Full Board. Board Member Karen Breashears asked the Board to have staff explain the difference between an administrative policy and a non-administrative policy. Chair Anderson acknowledged Ms. Breashear’s question and placed it on the agenda for the next Arkansas Workforce Development Board meeting.

Announcements: Chair Anderson announced the committee meetings of the Arkansas Workforce Development Board will convene “as needed” due to the COVID-19 pandemic and out of respect for Board Member’s schedules. The next Full Board meeting is set for October 19, 2021. Board Staff will keep everyone aware of any changes to the schedule or the type of meeting, whether virtual or in-person, as the State progresses through COVID-19 under the guidance of Governor Asa Hutchinson.

Adjourn: As presented, Chair Tom Anderson adjourned the AWDB Full Board meeting at 12:06 p.m., on a motion made by Mr. George Nunnally, followed by Mr. Len Blaylock III making the second motion. The motion carried unanimously with none opposed.

The following votes were recorded and voiced by Board Members on a roll vote to Approve, Disapprove, or Abstain for no vote: Mr. Joseph Baxter – Approve, Mr. Len Blaylock III – Approve, Ms. Karen Breashears – Approve, Mr. Scott Bull – Absent, Dr. Charisse Childers – Approve, Judge Brandon Ellison – Approve, Mr. Randy Finegan – Approve, Mr. Jeff Griffin – Absent, Ms. Melissa Hanesworth – Absent, Mr. Randy Henderson – Approve, Ms. Abby Houseworth – Absent, Mr. Alan Hughes – Absent, Ms. Rebecca Ives – Approve, Mr. Charles Johnson – Approve, Ms. Erin Franks proxy for Mr. Johnny Key – Approve, Ms. Candice Lawrence – Approve, Ms. Holley Little – Absent, Dr. Maria Markham – Absent, Mr. Brian Marsh – Approve, Ms. Bridgett Criner proxy for Dr. Trenia Miles – Approve, Mr. George Nunnally – Approve, Secretary Mike Preston – Absent, Dr. Julie Roberson – Absent, Mayor James Sanders – Approve, Mr. Kelley Sharp – Approve, Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes – Approve, Mr. Robert Thorne – Approve, and Dr. Diana Wright – Approve.



Thomas Anderson, Board Chairman
Arkansas Workforce Development Board



Chad Brown, Director Workforce Development
Arkansas Division of Workforce Services

*Minutes recorded by Tyler Gibbons
Arkansas Division of Workforce Services Staff*