

**MINUTES**  
**ARKANSAS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**  
**September 18, 2024**

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board convened on September 18, 2024, beginning at 10:08 a.m. The meeting was conducted in person at the Little Rock Workforce Center. Chairman Tom Anderson presided with the following members voicing their presence: Commissioner Joseph Baxter, Mr. Len Blaylock, Ms. Karen Breashears, Mr. Miles Crawford, Mr. William French, Mr. Randy Henderson, Ms. Rebecca Ives, Dr. Trenia Miles, Mr. George Nunnally, Mr. Justin Major, proxy for Mr. Clint O'Neal, Ms. Latanyua Robinson, Mr. Kelley Sharp, Director Cody Waits, Dr. Tina Moore, proxy for Dr. Ken Warden, and Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes.

Governor Sanders, Mr. Charles Johnson, Ms. Candice Lawrence, Ms. Holley Little, Mr. Brian Marsh, and Judge Brandon Ellison could not attend. A quorum was established.

Chairman's Opening Comments: Chairman Anderson welcomed the board.

**Agenda Item 1: ACTION-Minutes of the March 21, 2024, Full Board Meeting:** Chairman Anderson asked if any revisions/corrections needed to be made to the March 21, 2024, meeting minutes.

**Hearing none, a motion was made by Len Blaylock to approve the minutes. Seconded by Kelley Sharp. The motion carried unanimously with none opposed.**

**Agenda Item 2: Informational-Administrative Reports:**

**Report of Chairperson:** Chairman Anderson acknowledged Mr. Ronald Vargas, Regional Monitor Advocate/Federal Project Officer from the United States Department of Labor with the Dallas Region's Employment and Training Administration-Office of Special Initiatives & Demonstrations. Mr. Vargas conducted an audit of the Employment Services and Migrant Seasonal Farmworker Program. Chairman Anderson thanked the staff of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services

**Report of AWDB Director:** Dr. Childers provided an update on the process of filling the vacant board member seats. Information has been sent over to the Governor's Board and Commission regarding the number of board seats that need to be filled. Some progress has been made and we are hopeful that we will be able to add more members to our committees and board. Dr. Childers will reach out to members of the Strategic Planning and Program and Performance Committees to schedule meetings to gain insight into their leadership roles and for Dr. Childers to discuss plans for them to work together on upcoming activities. Dr. Childers is still working on the crosswalk to incorporate the WIOA State Plan and the Arkansas Workforce Strategy to ensure that we are meeting the objectives of both plans on the items that are similar. Once the crosswalk is ready, Dr. Childers will present the crosswalk to the Strategic Planning Committee. Dr. Childers plans on emailing the board members later this month a document that lists the recommendations and strategic goals of each of the plans so they can review the similarities and gain perspective on the level of difficulty it takes to ensure what needs to be captured is being captured from both plans in a structure for the board to follow.

On September 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the US Department of Labor had its ETA Technical Visit. Our staff and monitors engaged in Workforce Development Month as well as our kickoff ceremony. Dr. Childers thanked the AR State Chamber for allowing use of their building for the kickoff ceremony held on

September 4, 2024. The mobile Be Pro, Be Proud Unit was onsite at the kickoff ceremony allowing US Department of Labor staff to tour the unit. Tanner Chapman, Senior Human Resources Manager for Cintas, spoke at the kickoff ceremony. Additional speakers included two individuals who spoke on their individual job seeker experiences. The first speaker was an out-of-school youth program participant, and the other speaker was an adult program participant. The WIOA Partners' Executive Meeting met after the ceremony. A copy of the AR Rankings and Labor Force Stats was made available to the board members and members of the public. Governor Sanders released a press release that stated, "Arkansas Leads the Nation in Job Growth". Another press release will be released on Friday, September 20, 2024, regarding the Arkansas unemployment rate.

Dr. Childers concluded her report by stating that two years ago, DWS joined forces with Arkansas Publishing to incorporate their our "Career Watch" magazine into the "Arkansas Next" magazine. This is a publication that goes out to all of the schools and allows us with our Labor Market Information and our Bureau of Labor Statistics to provide detailed occupation information and stories. A new publication will be available later this fall. The digital edition of "Arkansas Next" will be sent out to the board members once it becomes available.

**Report of State Workforce Agency Director:** Director Waits provided a brief overview of the progress being made on resolving outstanding monitoring reports. This week there were three reports from two years ago, that have been resolved. The monitoring and reporting spreadsheet will be updated quarterly to continue tracking the resolution of the monitoring reports. Progress is being made on the staff transition from #2 Capitol Mall to the Commerce Building. Plans are in the works to finalize the sale of the building in the next 30 to 60 days. Progress is also being made on the realignment. Director Waits stated that work is being done on establishing our version of a Georgia Quick Start model to help support economic development prospects and projects. Director Waits strives to visit all of our local offices. The purpose of these visits is to get familiar with our staff and partners in the offices to discuss any issues, concerns, and opportunities for growth and collaboration.

**Staff Report:** Director Eddie Thomas provided updates on WIOA funding for PY24. Arkansas received approximately 15 million for youth, adult, and dislocated worker grants. 5 million was devoted to youth. Another 5 million was devoted to adults, and about 4 million was devoted to dislocated workers. Out of that 15 million, 11 thousand goes directly to the local workforce development boards, and the remainder is used to provide state-wide activities and oversight and administrative functions. Director Thomas also discussed the memo that was sent to all Employment & Training Staff specifically to Arkansas Workforce Connection outlining the staffing and operational changes. 8 full-time traditional employment and training staff were transferred to the new Employment Services- Service Center. 4 full-time staff members were transferred to the Re-Employment RESEA program; 1 full-time staff transferred to the TAA program; 2 full-time staff transferred to our Rapid Response program; 1 full-time staff transitioned to a Special Projects team and 1 full-time staff transferred to the Employment Services/Re-Entry program. Additionally, 1 full-time staff member was transferred to the WIOA Policy team, and 1 full-time staff member was transferred to the JVSG Vets program. The Mena location is now closed as of 8-31-24. Workforce services are still being offered on the campus of U of A Rich Mountain without a physical local office presence. ES staff have been pulled from the Harrison and El Dorado local offices. The Forrest City office is now a comprehensive center. 12 intermittent staff were laid off. Director Thomas concluded his report by providing an update on the progress of the outreach grants. All ten local

workforce boards submitted proposals, received grant awards, and are implementing plans included in the outreach campaigns.

**Agenda Item 3: ACTION TANF Oversight Committee Report:** Chairman Gan Nunnally stated that a TANF Oversight Committee Meeting was held on September 17, 2024, via Zoom. Act 832 was reviewed. Act 832 transferred the TANF program from the Division of Workforce Services to the Department of Human Services. Chairman Gan Nunnally asked for a motion to recommend the TANF committee be dissolved due to the program no longer having jurisdiction under ADWS and no longer being a WIOA required partner in the WIOA Combined State Plan.

**A motion was made by Mr. Miles Crawford to dissolve the TANF Committee and seconded by Mr. Len Blaylock. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.**

**Agenda Item 4: INFORMATIONAL Unemployment Insurance & Modernization:** Director Kristen Rhodes provided updates on the Unemployment Insurance program and their modernization efforts. System Integration Training (SIT) began in early September. The transition from the main frame will be completed by March 2025. Steady progress is being made on reworking claimant and employer interfacing. The claimant certification hub will be completed by the end of this year, and it will be fully incorporated in LAUNCH. The requirement for claimants to register for work to claim unemployment will be removed and that process will also be incorporated into LAUNCH. Claimant-facing notices are being re-worded for simplicity and better understanding. The employer portal for UI claimants will be ready to use in March 2025. The claimant portal will allow the claimants to be able to check their claim status without relying on notices received in the mail or by calling by phone to get a status update. Progress is also being made on improving our metrics. Director Kristen Rhodes concluded her report with numbers from prior week unemployment claims. Out of 5 thousand claims received, 1.3 million dollars was spent on processed unemployment claims for 3,308 claimants.

**Agenda Item 5: INFORMATIONAL-Migrant Seasonal Farmworker Program:** Mr. Will Craton and Ms. Ashley Farfan, MSFW Outreach Specialist, provided an overview of the Migrant Seasonal Farmworker Program. Eight outreach events have been held across the state from February through September of this year. Their presentation concluded by providing information on the future work in addressing the needs, barriers, and challenges of Migrant Seasonal Farmworkers.

**Agenda Item 6: INFORMATIONAL-Arkansas WIOA System Evaluation & Customer Service Final Report:** Dr. Brent Williams, Dr. Keith Vire, Dr. Xinya Liang, and Dr. Julie Hill performed the research for this study. Six local workforce boards were assigned to the study: Northeast Arkansas Workforce Development Board, Southeast Arkansas Workforce Development Board, Central Arkansas Workforce Development Board, City of Little Rock Arkansas Workforce Development Board, Southwest Arkansas Workforce Development Board, and Northwest Arkansas Local Workforce Development Board. The local workforce areas assigned for this study all have adequate procedures in place to identify, on an ongoing basis, skills gaps in their regions of the state. While some are more formal than others, all of the local workforce areas are involved in identifying skills gaps in their areas. Identification of the Skills Gaps in an area generally involves "obtaining the work requirements from the employer and determining the potential employee's interests." It is the opinion of the evaluators that the six centers reviewed for this study are in substantial compliance with all ADWS regulations and that the managers take their regulatory responsibilities seriously. The evaluators further believe that the review of these six centers provides a representative picture of ADWS centers across the state and that ADWS and those who manage the

Local Workforce Areas, as well as Arkansas' taxpaying citizens, should be confident in the work of the thirty-two workers centers located throughout the state.

**Agenda Item 7: Reimagine Arkansas Workforce Grant:** Ms. Shenaye Johns provided an overview of the Reimagine Grant. Ms. Tara Dryer from UAGC stated that UAGC's involvement with the Reimagine Grant ends this year. As of August 21, 2024, 1,293 students have completed their program of study, and 3,659 students enrolled in various programs under the Reimagine Grant. UAGC has created six new programs of study. They are Aerospace Composite Manufacturing, Customer Service, Industrial Maintenance, Advanced Manufacturing, IT Help Desk, and Solar Energy. Ms. Dryer ended her presentation with two success stories. Dr. Angee Valentine provided an overview of the progress being made by the students at Shorter College. A total of 401 students are enrolled with 145 completions. Dr. Valentine stated that they now have students enrolled through the Reimagine Grant in Madison County and they are working on plans to continue outreach to the northern part of the state.

**Agenda Item 8: Action-Reimagine Arkansas Workforce Grant-USDOE 5<sup>th</sup> Year Extension Request:** Chairman Anderson stated that at our last board meeting the board agreed to table a decision to approve a 5<sup>th</sup> Year extension of the grant for Shorter College. Chairman Anderson asked for a motion to approve or deny the 5<sup>th</sup> Year Extension for Shorter College Reimagine grant.

**A motion was made by Mr. William French to approve the 5<sup>th</sup> Year Extension for the Shorter College Reimagine Grant and seconded by Mrs. Latanyua Robinson. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.**

**Agenda Item 9: INFORMATIONAL-WIOA Partner Updates:** Director Thomas provided brief updates on Title I and III and provided success stories from three participants of the WIOA Title I Youth, Adult, & Dislocated Worker Program. Mr. Gary Do provided information on the Employment Services (ES)-Virtual Service Center. The ES Service Center is a part of a hybrid service delivery model. Customers who prefer face-to-face services will be able to meet with ES workforce specialists at local workforce centers. ES staff will assist customers in registering in CiviForm, which will create an automated registration in AJL. CiviForm will allow for multiple referrals to be made in partner programs. Ms. Dominique Euell spoke briefly about the Reentry program. She is working closely with DHS and DYS on addressing barriers facing the juvenile population.

Title II: Dr. Trenia Miles provided updates on Adult Education. Adult Education programs provide basic skills classes to adults with less than a high school education. The Adult Education program has moved up in ranking from #4 to #2 in GED passers. The focus of Adult Education this year is digital literacy. Adult Education is more than just GED classes. They help adults with integrating soft skills, digital and financial literacy, English language acquisition, and college courses. Dr. Trenia Miles ended her presentation with a success story.

Title IV: Commissioner Joseph Baxter spoke on the services provided by Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS). ARS provides their services through Field Services, Access and Accommodations, and Business Services. ARS VR Now is fully launched. Commission Baxter shared information about eligibility for ARS programs. Commissioner Baxter concluded his presentation with two success stories.

Title IV: Dr. Cassondra Stokes-Williams stated that DSB received an additional 1.2 million dollars in federal funding for their technology lab. Dr. Cassondra Stokes-Williams yielded her presentation to Mr.

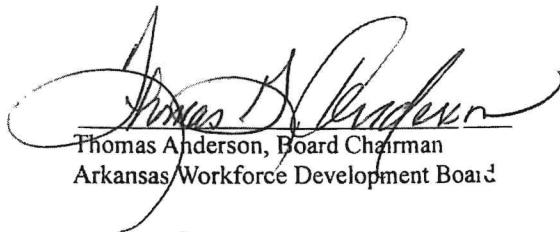
Gustavo. Mr. Gustavo provided updates on DSB's vending program and demonstrated the AI technology devices that helps him, and other participants perform their job duties.

**Board Open Discussion:** None

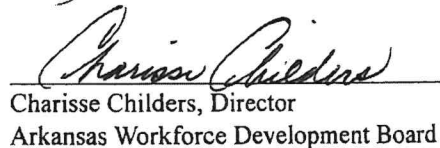
**Public Opportunity to Address the Board:** None

**Announcements:** The WIOA Partners Meeting will be held at the Little Rock Embassy Suites Hotel from November 6<sup>th</sup>-November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

**Adjournment:** Chairman Anderson asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Miles Crawford and seconded by Mr. Len Blaylock. The motion carried unanimously with none opposed. The meeting adjourned at 2:33 p.m.



Thomas Anderson, Board Chairman  
Arkansas Workforce Development Board



Charisse Childers, Director  
Arkansas Workforce Development Board

*Minutes recorded by Victoria Hal  
Arkansas Workforce Connections Staff*