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ARKANSAS WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS ISSUANCE NUMBER PY 26-05

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FROM: Arkansas Workforce Development Board
Cody Waits, Executive Director – Arkansas Workforce Connections
Eddie Thomas, Director – Office of Employment & Training

TO: Local Workforce Development Boards, Chief Elected Officials & Service Providers

SUBJECT: Network of Affiliate Sites in Lieu of a Comprehensive Center Under Approved Waiver

Purpose

This issuance states Arkansas policy for the structure of the one-stop delivery system in each local workforce development area. It implements the waiver of WIOA section 121(e)(1) and 20 CFR 678.300(c) approved by the U.S. Department of Labor for Program Years 2026 and 2027. Under that waiver a local area may meet its one-stop delivery obligation through a network of affiliate sites, partner-embedded access points, mobile units, and virtual channels rather than through at least one comprehensive physical center. This issuance takes effect immediately.

Background

Under 20 CFR 678.300(c), the one-stop delivery system "must include at least one comprehensive physical center in each local area as described in § 678.305." Arkansas requested relief from that requirement because of falling foot traffic at fixed centers, rising property costs, the difficulty of finding rural real estate that can house all required partners in one location, and the success of the CONNECT virtual employment services hotline and the LAUNCH online labor exchange platform.

What Is Waived and What Is Not

Waived

- WIOA section 121(e) and 20 CFR 678.300(c) are waived, to the extent they require at least one comprehensive physical center in each local workforce development area. A local area may instead deliver required services through a network of affiliate sites described in this issuance.

Not waived and still in full effect

- Physical and programmatic accessibility for individuals with disabilities at every site, under WIOA section 188 and 29 CFR part 38, including 20 CFR 678.310(d).
- The affiliate site requirements at 20 CFR 678.310, including subsection (b). Wagner-Peyser Act employment

services cannot be a stand-alone affiliated site, as described in 20 CFR 678.315.

- The requirement that required partner programs provide access to programs, services, and activities through electronic means where applicable and practicable, and that electronic delivery comply with WIOA section 188 and 29 CFR part 38 [20 CFR 678.300(e)].
- The obligation of each required one-stop partner to make its applicable career services available and to contribute to infrastructure costs in comprehensive centers [WIOA sec. 121(b); 20 CFR 678.400 through 678.435].
- The memorandum of understanding (MOU) and infrastructure funding agreement (IFA) requirements at 20 CFR 678.500 through 678.510 and 678.700 through 678.760. The design of the local area's one-stop delivery system must be described in the MOU [20 CFR 678.300(f)].
- One-stop certification under WIOA section 121(g) and 20 CFR 678.800. Every site in the network that is designated as an affiliate or comprehensive site must be certified.
- Priority of service, eligibility, performance accountability, and all program requirements. This waiver changes where services are delivered. It does not change what is delivered or to whom.

Effective Date and Duration

This issuance is effective immediately. It remains in effect through June 30, 2028, and may be extended if the waiver is renewed.

Policy

A. No center closes by operation of this issuance

This issuance does not close, consolidate, or decertify any existing Arkansas Workforce Center affiliated with the American Job Center network. Every comprehensive center operating on the date of this issuance continues to operate under its current certification unless or until the local board acts under section C below and Arkansas Workforce Connections (AWC) approves the change. AWC may also recommend changes to current certified locations for local board consideration. A local area that takes no action under this issuance continues under its current configuration with no further filing.

B. What the network must deliver

A local area operating without a comprehensive center must still make every required service available to every customer in the area. The network as a whole must provide:

1. All basic and individualized career services listed at 20 CFR 678.430.
2. Access to the programs, services, and activities of every required one-stop partner, whether by staff presence, cross-trained staff, direct linkage by technology, or scheduled staff rotation. Direct linkage means a real-time connection to a program staff member, not a brochure, a voicemail box, or an unstaffed phone line.
3. Wagner-Peyser Act employment services delivered from a site that also houses at least one other required partner program, consistent with 20 CFR 678.310(b) and 678.315.
4. Physical and programmatic accessibility at every physical site, and accessible electronic delivery, under 29 CFR part 38.

C. Service Access Plan required before conversion

A local board that intends to operate without a comprehensive center must submit a Service Access Plan to AWC at WIOA@arkansas.gov and receive written approval before the change takes effect. The plan must include:

1. A county-level coverage map showing every access point in the network and its type: affiliate site,

partner-embedded site, specialized center, or scheduled mobile unit stop.

2. For each access point, the address, the days and hours of operation, the staff physically present, and the partner programs available there and by what method.
3. For each of the required one-stop partner programs, a statement of how a customer reaches that program from any access point in the network.
4. The agreed-upon mobile unit schedule, by location and frequency, for at least the next two quarters, if applicable.
5. An accessibility statement for each physical site and for the electronic channels, addressing 29 CFR part 38.
6. A description of how the local area will serve customers who lack broadband, a device, or the digital literacy to use virtual services.
7. The current MOU and infrastructure funding agreement, and a statement of what must be renegotiated and by when.
8. A budget comparison showing current infrastructure and facility cost and projected cost under the network, and identifying where the savings will be redirected.
9. A continuity plan showing that no customer loses access to a service during the transition, including how customers with open service plans at an affected site will be contacted and reassigned.
10. Documentation of consultation with the chief elected official and with each required partner, and any written objection received.

AWC will issue a decision on a Service Access Plan within thirty (30) days of submission. AWC may approve the plan, approve it with conditions, or deny it. A denial will state what is missing or inadequate.

D. Certification of sites

Every affiliate site in the network must be certified before it is open to the public as a place to receive workforce services. Certification uses the criteria adopted by the Arkansas Workforce Development Board under 20 CFR 678.800 as reflected in WIOA Title I-B Policy 6.4, Change 1. A partner location that is not currently in the American Job Center network, including an adult education center or a vocational rehabilitation office, may be certified as an affiliate site on the same criteria. A site that fails certification may not be listed as an access point.

E. Partner departure from a comprehensive center

When a required partner leaves a comprehensive center and the remaining partners cannot meet the comprehensive center standard at 20 CFR 678.305, the local board may convert the location to an affiliate site under this issuance rather than securing alternate provision of every required program at that location. The board must notify AWC in writing within fifteen (15) days of the partner's departure and submit or amend a Service Access Plan within sixty (60) days.

F. Memoranda of understanding and infrastructure funding agreements

A change in the configuration of the one-stop delivery system requires the local board to modify the MOU and the IFA with the required partners. The MOU must describe the network as it actually operates. Infrastructure cost contributions must be recalculated to reflect the sites that actually exist and the partners that actually use them. The local board must complete this negotiation within ninety (90) days of AWC approval of the Service Access Plan and provide the executed documents to AWC.

G. Branding and public notice

Every affiliate site must display the appropriate American Job Center branding. The local board must publish the full network, with locations, hours, and the mobile unit schedule (if applicable), on its public website and

provide the same information to AWC for the statewide directory. Any change to a location, its hours, or the mobile schedule must be posted at least ten (10) business days in advance and, where a site closes, posted at that site.

Documentation and Monitoring

A local area operating under this issuance must report quarterly to AWC on:

- Program enrollments by access point and by county, with rural and urban breakout.
- Participant characteristics, sufficient to show whether service to individuals with barriers to employment is holding or improving.
- Time from first contact to first staff-assisted service.
- Infrastructure and facility costs, compared to the baseline in the approved Service Access Plan, and the actual redirection of any savings.
- Customer satisfaction results, collected on an ongoing basis.
- Partner engagement, including referrals into and out of WIOA programs.

AWC will include the network configuration in its regular monitoring. AWC may require a local area to restore a physical access point, or to return to a comprehensive center configuration, if monitoring shows that access, enrollment, or service to a protected group has declined materially under the network model. Waiver outcomes will be reported in the Arkansas WIOA Annual Report as required by 20 CFR 679.620.

Local Board Action Required

1. Decide whether the local area intends to operate under this waiver. If a local board does not intend to convert any existing comprehensive centers to affiliate centers, send notification of that decision to WIOA@arkansas.gov.
2. A local board that intends to convert a center under this waiver must submit a Service Access Plan to WIOA@arkansas.gov under section C before making any change.
3. Review local policy on center certification, site designation, and hours of service, and conform it to this issuance within thirty (30) days.
4. Distribute this issuance to local board members, the chief elected official, one-stop operators, required partners, and center staff.

Policies Superseded or Affected

- Any local board policy requiring a comprehensive center in the local area is superseded to the extent of conflict.
- State policy on workforce center certification and affiliate sites is amended to the extent it requires a comprehensive physical center in every local area.

Inquiries

WIOATA@arkansas.gov

Attachments

Attachment A: Service Access Plan Template (to be issued)

Expiration Date

June 30, 2028, unless earlier superseded as described under Effective Date and Duration.