



## **Essex County Workforce Development Board**

In Person Holiday Meeting at Essex County College, West Caldwell Campus

### **Minutes from Meeting: December 14, 2023**

Attendees: Aleksandra Adamczyk, Mary Alexander, Michael Andreas\*, Cristhian Barcelos\*, Michelle Blackshear, Dr. Boakye\*, Joyce Bryant, Kevin Butler, Apryl Caldwell, Judy Celestin, Mitra Choudhury, Maureen Clifford, Pam Cohen, Monique Collins, Evanthia Corrado, Qonisha Earl Dasent, Robert Diehl\*, Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Melissa Dorlean, John Ehret, Eileen Fishman, Keisha Flemming, Madelaine Garcia, Lynette Gonzalez, Robin Guarino, Theresa Howard, Nesha Howell, Tracie Johnson, Sonya Jones-Graves, Kristen Levey, Taieta El-Amin, Jacqeline Lue Raia\*, Pamela Mata, Hilary McCarron\*, Donna McKnight, Wendy Melendez\*, Jobi Odeneye, Iverlisse Pabon, Lillian Pichardo, Shakira Plumb, Anthony Puglisi, Anibal Ramos\*, Alle Ries\*, Maureen Ritchie\*, Victor Rotonda, Janine Schaeffer, David Sharp, Rebecca Shulman, Craig Stanley, Lynn Sternstein, Gavin Taylor, Willie Tolbert\*, Margaret Tyson\*, Amy Vazquez\*, Sylvia Velez, Elvy Vieira, Howard Weiss, Iris Wells, Stacey Wolff,

**\*WDB members**

**Minutes from the last WDB meeting in November were approved.**

### **Welcome and Introduction**

Dr. Boakye welcomed everyone to the new Essex County College West Caldwell Campus. He thanked everyone for coming and said that he is looking forward to working together in the future.

Willie Tolbert greeted the group and thanked everyone for their participation and he then introduced Anibal Ramos, Director of the Department of Economic Development, Training & Employment.

Anibal Ramos welcomed everyone and thanked the Chairman for keeping everyone on track. He also thanked Howard Weiss, Acting Director of the Workforce Development Board, who has been with the County a very long time. He added that there is no one in the State of New Jersey that knows more about workforce development. His energy and commitment is inspiring.

The Workforce Development Boards play an important role in promoting collaboration and connecting the available workforce with training and jobs. Anibal stated that the Department of Citizen Services serves residents in different capacities from housing juveniles in the Detention Center to providing residents with social services, helping people with evictions, providing services for the seniors. Anibal added that his career in Training & Employment started almost thirty (30) years ago at a non-profit organization. He added that the ability to connect residents with available opportunities is a little bit different. The job market continues to be strong, but at the same time as a One Stop we have to make sure that those resources are available in terms of training and Adult Education opportunities.

Anibal stated that it is not an accident that we are at Essex County College, because any successful workforce development system has a great relationship with their county community college. He added that under the leadership of Dr. Boakye, ECC is now reconnecting in a stronger way than ever with our workforce development system. He also thanked the team at Essex County College, Mitra Choudhury and Elvy Vieira. He added that Community Colleges are in a challenging environment.

Joseph N. DiVincenzo, the Essex County Executive thanked Dr. Boakye, who prior to being the president of ECC was with the college twenty-two (22) years and worked his way up. He added that Dr. Boakye has made many changes to make the college more accountable and self-sufficient. He stated that the students and the community are very happy with the new facilities. Within four (4) years they rebuilt the School of Technology, on Passaic Avenue and this facility. The County Executive then thanked Howard Weiss, Acting Director of the workforce Development Board, who has been with the county fifty (50) years, who started before there were County Executives.

He added that Howard has a great team to help him because nothing can get done unless you work together as a team, you need the social service agencies, the businesses, the county, you need everyone to help the people that need help. The County Executive thanked Willie Tolbert for doing such a great job and told him he is a great leader.

### **Committee Reports:**

#### **Literacy Committee**

Judith Celestin, Director of the Adult Learning Center at Essex County College, Co-chair of the Literacy Committee along with Lynn Sternstein. She stated that she is giving a synopsis of the report submitted to the state from the Consortium, of which ECC is the lead agency. The consortium was charged with serving students in ESL, High School Equivalency preparation, citizenship, computer skills and Adult Basic Education. The Consortium received \$2.3 million with an additional \$450,000 from the state to provide integrated educational services. The consortium members highlighted several different programs Home Health Aide, Certified Nursing Assistant and Pharmacy Technician. She then thanked the partners: JVS, Essex County School of Technology, FOCUS, La Casa de Don Pedro, New Community, and the Literacy Volunteers of America.

#### **Small Business Committee Report**

Bob Diehl stated that he is partner with Bittiger, Elias, Triolo & Diehl and chair of the Small Business Committee. He thanked all the members that participated in all the meetings throughout the year. This committee seeks to help and inform businesses. He mentioned the video series that can be seen on the county website. He added that for the coming year they are looking to partner with the Disability Committee to provide training for small businesses on employing people with disabilities. He added that if anyone knows a small business that could benefit from being profiled to let him know.

#### **Disability Committee**

Rebecca Shulman, Co-Chair of the Committee stated that they had a wonderful year with the return of the Employer Recognition Event that was held this past October at the Wilshire Grand Hotel in West Orange. She thanked everyone for their hard work in putting together the event and also, she thanked her Co-Chair Maureen Ritchie, DVRS manager. She added that they are very excited to be working with the Small Business Committee in partnership for the Small Business training. This past April, the Disability Committee also provided training for the One-Stop staff that was hosted by the Kessler Foundation. She stated that anyone who would want to join the committee should contact her.

#### **Youth Investment Council (YIC)**

Allie Ries, CRA Officer for M&T Bank and Chair of the Youth Investment Council. She stated that they had a great year with almost two hundred (200) students participating in the Summer Youth Program. Overall, the students were very happy with their placements. She thanked everyone that attends the meetings and the staff of the One-Stop Career Center.

#### **Welfare to Work Committee**

Alexandra Adamczyk gave the report for David Weiner, who could not attend. She stated that this committee works on issues relating to GA, TANF and the SNAP population. She added that there

have been a number of challenges this year including the elimination of the 28 Day Protocol and the suspension of sanctions for TANF & SNAP clients. Alex stated that there are a lot more people coming through the door looking for services and training. She added that the WDB approved an increase in the amount that can be spent on the Individual Training Accounts up to \$6,500. Per person. She wished everyone a Happy Holidays and New Year.

## One Stop Committee

Howard stated that the One Stop Committee has been meeting every month for the past eighteen (18) years with one exception. That exception was April 2020, the first month of the pandemic, then we quickly adapted to Zoom calls. He stated that it started with his previous Director, Sam Okparaekwe, who wanted to bring together all the partners. Howard thanked everyone that he contacted to work on the Partner MOU and he added that as a result they will be putting together a resource guide and doing a staff training and all the partner agencies.

## Closing Remarks

Amy Vazques, Vice President of the Employer Association of New Jersey and Vice Chair of the Essex County WDB. She expressed her gratitude in serving on the Board, as the room is filled with dedicated and passionate individuals. She added that she joined the Board in July 2020, during the pandemic, and this is her first opportunity to meet many of the participants in person. She thanked Dr. Boakye and Essex County College for hosting this event today in this beautiful facility. Amy stated that in listening to all the committee reports there is a lot to be optimistic about as the work that everyone is doing is meaningful and necessary and she hopes that everyone here can find meaning in the work. She thanked everyone for there participation and hard work, including Howard, Janine, Keisha and Jobi.

### Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

*Respectfully submitted by*  
*Janine Schaeffer*

**NEXT ZOOM MEETING DATES:** One Stop- January 23, 2024, 9am  
WDB- February 22, 2024 9am

