



Essex County Workforce Development Board

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

Minutes from Meeting: December 11, 2025

Attendees: Aleksandra Adamczyk, Lolita Ashley, Nela Blanco, Melody Bundy, Renee Burgess, Apryl Caldwell, Ana Chavarria, Judy Celestin, Mitra Choudhury, Maureen Clifford, Pam Cohen, Evanthia Corrado, Robert Diehl*, Melissa Dorlean, John Ehret, Taieta El Amin, Lisa Fiore, Marcelle Gibson-Hyles, Keirston Gordon (JVS)*, Robin Guarino, Tasmeya Hall, Amir Hashemi*, Theresa Howard, Nesha Howell, Lorna Jacobs, Tracie Johnson, Ashley Jones, Jackie Lue Raia*, John Mansilla, Donna McKnight, Wendy Melendez*, Angelo Montoyo, Tattyanna Morales-Vega, Andre Narvaez, Jobi Odeneye, Kendra Orta, Iverlisse Pabon (Eastwick)*, Shakira Plumb, Anibal Ramos*, Valentina Richardson-Green, Alle Ries*, Maureen Ritchie*, Sherley Sanchez, Janine Schaeffer, Pat Sermon (Urban League)*, David Sharp, Rebecca Shulman, Tony Staynings, Craig Stanley, Lynn Sternstein, Dr. Willie Tolbert*, Margaret Tyson*, Elisha Vega, Sylvia Velez, Ana Lissett Vera, Elvy Vieira (ECC)*, Gloria Vrabel*, Howard Weiss, Denece Young

*WDB members

Minutes from the last WDB meeting in October were approved.

Minutes from the last One-Stop meeting in November were approved.

Welcome and Introduction

Howard Weiss welcomed everyone to the in-person end-of-year joint meeting of the One Stop Partners and Essex County Workforce Development Board. He highlighted the package that was provided which included today's agenda, the new 2026 meeting calendar, a list of the Board's accomplishments for 2025, an article from Futureworksystems.com, the October WDB minutes and the November One-Stop minutes. Though Howard notes it was a challenging year, he thanked everyone for their time and dedication, especially those who worked on committees.

Dr. Elvy Vieira welcomed everyone to Essex County College, West Caldwell Campus. She mentioned that she has worked at the college for 37 ½ years. She added that they use this room for various events and last year they welcomed approximately three thousand (3,000) people that came through the various events in this room. This past year there were seven hundred (700) students that studied business, finance, computer science or liberal arts. There is also a new LPN Program that started last year. She wished everyone a joyous and prosperous 2026.

Willie Tolbert greeted the group and thanked everyone for their participation, and he asked for a moment of silence in remembrance to Samuel Okparaeke, former WDB Director. 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, Executive Director of the Workforce Development Board, who has been with the County a very long time. He added that Joe DiVincenzo is a bit under the weather today.

The Workforce Development Boards play an important role in promoting collaboration and connecting the available workforce with training and jobs and he added that we are blessed to have an

active Board. Anibal stated that during uncertain times there is always opportunity. The Board will play a critical role going forward in ensuring that we are getting the customers ready for some of the emerging jobs growing in our community. He thanked Elvy Vieira and noted the longstanding partnership with Essex County College. On behalf of the County Executive, Anibal wished everyone a happy holiday and thanked Howard and his team and Valentina.

Willie then called for the vote of the WDB minutes from October, they passed. Willie then called for a vote on the One-Stop minutes from November, and they passed.

Howard Weiss stated that this year we are conducting the voting for the positions of Chair and Vice Chair. All WDB members and designees were issued a ballot when they signed in. Members were directed to the ballot box in the front of the room and noted that we will be counting them during the committee reports. He then introduced Valentina Richardson-Green.

Valentina stated that she is the Director of the Division of Training & Employment. She added that they have been working diligently with the DOL grantees. They were all invited to the One-stop and were familiarized with the work done there. The primary goal is to make sure correct information flows to them and from them in order to best help the customers. Valentina stated that there are many various opportunities for customers from HVAC, teachers in the making, tutoring training etc. The goal is to help people get good jobs so they can be successful and support themselves and that is what the One-Stop is committed to doing.

Committee Reports:

Literacy Committee

Lynn Sternstein thanked that Literacy Committee for all their time and energy. The committee itself had positive results for FY25, she stated that the Title II Literacy Consortia received just under \$2.4 million dollars and serviced one thousand four hundred eighty-three (1,483) students, which was above the contracted amount. This was also a twenty-three (23%) percent increase over the prior year. Participants attended over one hundred-sixty-five thousand (165,000) hours of instruction. The overall measurable skills gain was sixty-seven (67%) which beat the performance target of fifty-six (56%). She added that the ABE (Adult Basic Education) was even higher with an eighty-eight (88%) percent gain. Also, the consortium beat employment targets for second and fourth quarter after exit. The IET classes that combine ESL, civics instruction and training (Microsoft Office, Certified Home Health Aide, CNA, Pharmacy Technician) one hundred (100%) percent of participants made a gain in improving their English proficiency and ninety-eight (98%) passed the occupational skills exam. She added that one (1) passed the GED and sixty-two (62%) percent were already working. Lynn stated that this past year saw the opening of the Literacy, Innovation and Technology HUB in two (2) locations. There is an in-house computer lab at 50 South Clinton and an out-station lab at D. Bilal Beasley Community Center in Irvington, which is open two (2) days a week. Both locations include self-paced individualized literacy services including ABE, low literacy and GED prep classes. Many just needed to upskill in order to meet a requirement to be put in a training class. It also offers an eight (8) week workplace and job readiness class, which includes financial literacy, domestic violence, effective communication and workplace accountability. Lynn stated that after all the uncertainty in 2025 (funding was paused for a period of time and many agencies laid off instructors and ended classes), Essex County received just under \$2.2 Million, which was a nineteen (19%) percent increase over the initial award, and it included over \$500,000. in state funds and for the first time agencies did not have to provide a twenty-five (25%) percent match for grant funds which was a welcome change. She added that they are too dependent on WIOA Title II Grant, they recognize that the State needs to take a much larger role in supporting adult education. She wrapped up with happy holidays and happy new year.

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 small businesses of relevant topics. This year the committee is compiling information to share with how to participate in business surrounding the world cup. Also, the committee is looking to host an AI Summit in the Spring in order to navigate the challenges of AI, understanding what is on the horizon and start thinking about worker protection. Our goal is to identify how AI will affect industry in Essex County.

Willie Tolbert added that there was also a Small Business Summit that was in this very room back in October that was very successful. He then introduced Maureen Ritchie as the Chair of the Disability Committee.

Disability Committee

Maureen stated that in addition to being one of the Chairs of the Disability Committee, she is the manager of the Newark DVRS Office. She recognized Rebecca Shulman as Co-Chair and recently retired from JVS. She also acknowledged Lisa Fiore, formerly of JESPY HOUSE, who also recently retired. Both have acknowledged their desire to still participate in this committee going forward. She added that this committee actually meets in person every two (2) months. Maureen stated that this past May the committee put on staff and partners training in stress reduction by the Mental Health Association and the Mental Health Players. She let everyone know that if there is a particular training that they are interested in to let her know and the committee will work on it. Also, for Disability Employment Awareness Month the committee puts on their annual Employer Recognition Event. This year it was at the Rock Spring Golf Club in West Orange, where breakfast was generously provided by JVS. Also, the County Executive was in attendance as well as Cheryl Yarborough, Assistant Commissioner Employment Accessibility Services. The Keynote address was from Leslie Steele, Executive Director, Art of Hospitality Workers Alliance. The awardees were Bottle King, Shop Rite of Livingston, Sodexo at Daughters of Israel and Macy's at the Short Hills Mall.

Youth Investment Council (YIC)

Alle Ries, CRA Officer for M&T Bank and Chair of the Youth Investment Council. She stated that she has worked in Newark for a long time at La Casa de Don Pedro, and she remembers when Carolyn Wallace from IYO, came to her and said they were creating something called the YIC. She remembers telling her to come up with a different name and now she is chairing the YIC. She stated that the staff gets all the credit for the successful Summer Youth Employment Program. Again, this year, there were almost two hundred kids that participated in the program. There were also about forty-five (45) college students. She thanked Apryl Caldwell, Keisha Flemming and all the staff that made the summer program successful. Alle added that she just started working with the Juvenile Justice Commission and is still learning. She thanked everyone that participated in the YIC

Welfare to Work Committee

David Weiner couldn't make this meeting, but Howard wanted to mention that there has been a lot of activity with Welfare to Work this year including changes to the work requirements. He added that there are a lot of changes and we will be working on those changes as we move through the new year.

One Stop Committee

Howard stated that the One Stop Committee has been meeting every month since 2005 except for one (1) month at the beginning of Covid. He stated that it started with his previous Director, Sam Okparaeke, who wanted to bring together all the partners. Howard stated that this past year the State of NJ issued Notices of Grant Opportunity to fund thirteen (13) different agencies and around the State, which is in addition to the money the One-Stops get. The challenge is to bring them into the One- Stop system and make everyone aware of the opportunities they offer for clients.

Howard closed by stating the winners of the election are Willie Tolbert to remain Chair and Alle Ries will be the new Vice Chair.

Closing Remarks

Willie thanked everyone for their support and stated that he and Alle look forward to doing an even better job for everyone next year. He added that it is really the work that everyone does and having the right people in place and he thanked everyone for making his job easy. He wished everyone a wonderful holiday and a prosperous new year.

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by

Janine Schaeffer

**NEXT ZOOM MEETING DATES: One Stop- January 18, 2026, 9am
WDB- January 22, 2026 9am**