



Essex County
Workforce Development Board
Zoom 9AM

Minutes from Meeting: January 22, 2026

Attendees: Larry Banks, Cristhian Barcelos*, Dr. Augustine Boakye*, Apryl Caldwell, Mitra Choudhury, Martinique Costa*, Aaliyah Dean, David DelVecchio*, Carol Dorazio*, Bob Diehl*, Jackie Lue Raia*, Hilary McCarron*, Jobi Odeneye, Ivelisse Pabon*, Alle Ries*, Maureen Ritchie*, Janine Schaeffer, Willie Tolbert*, Margaret Tsyson*, David Weiner*, Howard Weiss,

*WDB members

Minutes from the last meeting in December were approved.

The added addendum to the Local Plan was approved, with abstention by Bob Diehl as he wasn't entirely on at the time of the vote.

Welcome and Introduction

Willie Tolbert welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Director's Report

Howard Weiss thanked all the members for participating in all WDB and committee events and he appreciates all the time and effort that everyone puts in. The new Governor, Mikie Sherrill, was sworn in, but we still do not have information on who the new Commissioner of Labor will be. The Deputy Commissioner is the Acting Commissioner right now. Many were asked to write their letter of resignation, but as of yet none have been accepted until a new commissioner comes in. Howard stated that they are working closely with Division of Family Development, as there have been changes to the SNAP (food stamp program) in the Big Beautiful Bill. There are still some things that have to be worked out between the Department of Labor and DFD and he is concerned because some things have already taken effect and there are still things that are not clear on who has responsibility. Also, the Federal Government sent out an issuance indicating that they are entertaining waivers for various items regarding WIOA. NJ has put in for a waiver two (2) years ago and gotten approval and never told the local areas. The waiver was to put more funding into In School Youth. Currently, we are required to put seventy-five (75%) percent of youth funding into Out of School Youth, which are difficult to serve, in that it is hard to find them and keep them engaged. The waiver allowed for up to fifty (50%) percent funding to be used for In School Youth, which are much easier to serve. He added that generally things are moving along and they just got word that there is funding for another Summer Youth Employment Program this year. The State is only allowing those local areas that had a SYEP last year to apply this year. The State is insisting that everyone that goes through the SYEP get co-enrolled into WIOA Adult Program. Howard added that it doesn't make sense to him and will actually be an impediment because now the kids will have to bring in income information in order to deem them eligible for WIOA, where they do not have to do that for SYEP. Alle added that with trust in government at an all time low that this is the wrong time to be asking the kids for more information.

Howard added that this year we are required to make a modification to the local plan and regional plan. He added that we are not putting in any changes to the plan other than some of the labor market information has changed. Jobi Odeneye compiled the changes and in everyone's packages is the new information, which will be an addendum to the plan. The modification to the plan was approved.

Industry Partnership

Jobi Odeneye stated that the Energy Industry Partnership of the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development in collaboration with the NJ Board of Public Utilities and the NJ Institute of Technology held a business and industry leadership team meeting at the College of NJ on Friday, October 17th, 2025. The purpose of the meeting was to shape the practical workforce solutions that will power the State's Green economy. PSE&G highlighted its Green Energy Job Program, which is focused on training individuals to help reduce energy consumption by two (2%) percent through proper weatherization programs. The program incorporates On the Job Training, by which individuals get paid while receiving hands on training. The program has had one hundred thirty-one (131) graduates to date. CMC Energy Services and other similar companies have hired individuals from the utility-trained programs. It is a sixteen (16) week paid training program.

He added that the Department of Labor Industry Leadership meeting reviewed different work-based learning programs that employers and individuals may benefit from including incumbent worker training, on-the-job training and apprenticeship in non-traditional sectors and pre-apprenticeship. These programs can be braided together or in conjunction with other local or federal grants to optimize training opportunities for participants. Jobi stated that after breakout sessions where the Northern region suggested a need to address generational gaps between young entrants and the 55+, who are switching careers. The next meeting will be March 11th at NJIT with emphasis on regional workforce development programs.

Committee Reports:

Small Business Committee Report

Bob Diehl stated that they are working on two different projects going into 2026, the first being an AI seminar for the Spring or early Summer where they bring in local businesses and talk about the use of AI. A real focus will be on how to use AI in order to compete with larger businesses but also to be aware of where AI may affect their various industries. He added that they are in the process of putting it together now and have a couple of speakers already lined up. Also, if anyone has any thoughts on this or wants to participate, please reach out to Bob. The other project is a subcommittee in anticipation of the World Cup, although it is not going to have any games in Essex County, there are a lot of business opportunities, and they are gathering information regarding what businesses would have to do whether it is getting a permit or organizing smaller events or just giving businesses information.

Disability Committee

Howard stated that there have been a number of retirements in this committee, the most notable was long-time Chair Rebecca Shulman, who has agreed to stay on as a member. The other retirements are Lisa Fiore from JESPY HOUSE and Elaine Katz from the Kessler Foundation. Maureen apologized in the chat for stepping away. That they hope to have the Mental Health Association of NJ do another training course with the Mental Health Players and they are open to topics at this point. She added that they are also planning another DEAM Event in October.

Literacy Committee

Lynn couldn't make the meeting, but Cristhian Barcelos stated that they finally received payments for July through October, only eight months late. He added that there are some efforts to get the State to do what other states are doing, and that is support adult education in a more organized way. Cristhian also added that immigration is a big concern where their students are afraid to get out of their houses

and attend class. Howard added that this past year has been one of the most challenging he has ever dealt with in job training with the Job Corp, Title II Literacy Programs, and 55+ Program all being shut down for a period of time. He added that he appreciates everyone that works in those programs and what they have had to deal with, the uncertainty of not knowing whether it was going to be the end of the program for good. He thanked everybody that has been involved with those efforts that has maintained these programs to ensure that we give the customers the services they need.

Welfare to Work Committee

David Weiner stated that they are reviewing the impact of the changes of the work requirements to both SNAP and then in next year or two Medicaid and the impact that's going to have on our agencies and our clients and the cooperation between DFAB and DTE in terms of sanctioning and they want to make more of an effort to get Newark back involved with the committee.

Youth Investment Council (YIC)

There was a discussion regarding the change in requirements for the SYEP. Howard added that the program is late this year and there is not a lot of time built in. He added that we need to submit a letter next week saying that we are interested in applying so there was no time built in to go to a committee. Alle Ries stated that they are discussing possibly doing something with the Business Committee, as the World Cup and AI would both be of interest to the Youth.

Oversight Committee

No Report.

One Stop Committee

Howard stated that they have had monthly meetings, the last being the joint WDB and One Stop meeting in December. He added that unfortunately the County Executive was under the weather and couldn't attend. He thanked everyone again for their participation.

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by

Janine Schaeffer

NEXT MEETING DATE: April 23, 2026, 9am