

COVID-19 Recovery: Supporting Workers and Modernizing the Workforce
Through Quality Education, Training, and Employment Opportunities

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Introduction

Good Morning. Thank you Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and
Members of the Committee, for inviting me to speak today.

Overview

Tennessee, like most states across the country, has experienced a significant
disruption in the workforce as a result of the pandemic. Whereas our most
recent unemployment rate of 5% looks promising, we recognize there are
workforce challenges that exist outside of the numbers. Unlike the Great
Recession where jobs were more scarce in our state, we have a significant
amount of jobs available to Tennesseans. Currently, we have of over 250K
available positions posted in our job database. The state experienced its
most substantial job growth in the trade/transportation/utilities sector.

The leisure/hospitality sector experienced the biggest loss of jobs over the year. However, as vaccination rates improve and overall conditions improve, we are seeing a real push to reengage workforce participants.

Equity and Access

In order to bridge the divide between those needing and wanting jobs and employers who desire workers, we collaborate with other workforce agencies and partners to provide comprehensive services both in American Job Centers and community access points across the State. This service model is key in advancing opportunities for all. In particular, we coordinate with Human Services to create, collect and share common intake information in order to best identify and coordinate eligibility to the appropriate programs and services that meet the overall needs of the individual. The availability of these services outside the traditional walls of the American One Stop System has helped to expand access for many Tennesseans.

Given the workforce vulnerability of minoritized workers across certain industry sectors, individualized and equitable access must be broadened to ensure workers most at risk for job loss or disruption can realize opportunities to participate in training programs that offer to best path to connect to high need and high wage employment opportunities. This includes an expansion of worker supports such as access to a high- quality childcare, transportation, broadband accessibility among others. This work will be strengthened by further aligning policy around eligibility and benefit

structures, regulations, state plan requirement and performance metrics.

This will bolster and support evidence- based outcomes for several workforce and education programs.

Integration

Whereas Tennessee has successful coordination with many education partners such as Adult Education, Career and Technical Education at the secondary level and technical and community colleges at the post-secondary level, we must ensure all future investments in the infrastructure around education, public health and transportation are inclusive of the public workforce system to ensure holistic and overall outcomes for those we serve. One such example of that coordination is the soon to be summer work experience project for in school and out of school youth that will support work-based education as well as the expansion of pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities.

This is just one example of state level coordination that can lead to sustainable and scalable models throughout our entire system.

However, public workforce here in Tennessee and at large will need sustainable and flexible funding options to continue to support both emergent and incumbent workers. Investments must be consistent to allow for maneuverability to address needs as they arise as opposed to reactive and restrictive funding that hinders states' ability to plan and execute as needed.

Conclusion

The public workforce at large will continue to play a vital role in economic and workforce recovery by providing access to training opportunities to individuals desiring reskilling or upskilling opportunities through both traditional and work -based education. When positioned well, programs and services within the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act can provide foundational stability with substantial outcomes for all.