



State Workforce Development Board

STATE OF TENNESSEE STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Friday May 16, 2025 – 10:00 AM – 11:04 AM

Board Members Present

Board Members Present by Proxy

Members Absent

Jacky Akbari	Mayor Tim Kelly	Joe Baker – Jason Schmitt, Proxy	Brandy Lassiter for State Senator Paul Bailey
Natalie Alvarez	Mayor Mike Pogreba (Northern Middle)	Michelle Falcon – Martha Axford, Proxy	State Representative Clark Boyd
Martha Axford	Stuart Price	Policy Director Michael Hendrix for Governor Bill Lee - Chrissy Freeland, Proxy	Ben Ferguson
Assistant Commissioner Jay Baker	Designee: Assistant Commissioner Deborah Knoll for Commissioner Lizzette Reynolds	Sandra Long - Jacky Akbari, Proxy	Designee: Director Jennie McCabe for Commissioner Stuart McWhorter
Jason Bates			
Tim Berry	Jason Schmitt		
Lynda Botsch	Lee Sloan		
Designee: Policy Advisor Suzanne Carr for Commissioner Clarence Carter	David Stansell		
	Commissioner Deniece Thomas		
Billy Dycus	Will Trumm		
Max Goldberg	Jeff Vance		
Marshall Graves (Southeast)	Ron Wade (Greater Memphis)		
J. Paul Jackson	Assistant Commissioner Kevin Wright		
David Jordan			

Location in parenthesis represents the state board member's membership on a local workforce board.

* Arrived after roll call

Welcome and Opening Thoughts

Chairman Berry welcomed everyone to the meeting and gratefully acknowledged the new board members who were attending for the first time today. He also offered the following comments:

1. The consistent thread through today's presentations would be system alignment. There are a lot of different departments in the state that have a very vested interest in workforce and today's presentations would be about aligning these systems and expanding our partnerships.
2. Joe Baker requested AI data at the last meeting and there was a lot of affirmation from the board about this topic. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) is working with several partners who are already doing similar data collection, and they'll continue to follow up with this board about this work in future meetings.
3. Earlier this month, the board submitted their funding position statement letter to their Congressional legislators. Chairman Berry thanked the members who provided their review and input.

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4. All the board members are going to be receive a Tennessee Works advocacy one-pager that's being developed in coordination with the Tennessee Works hub partners.
 5. Another strategic planning session is being planned for Thursday August 21. Board members were asked to hold this date on their calendars.
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Roll Call

Iler Bradley conducted the roll call and established the presence of a quorum.

Consent Agenda (vote required)

Chairman Berry requested a motion to approve the minutes for the February 28, 2025 meeting. It was moved by Jason Bates and seconded by Martha Axford to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed.

Workforce System Updates

Deniece Thomas, Commissioner – Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD)

Commissioner Thomas gave the following system updates:

Federal Budget – A first glance at this budget was granted last week. Unfortunately, the projected cut for the Department of Labor at the federal level was approximately 35%. There are still house markups and a lot of additional conversation. The program that specifically helps our senior adults, the Senior Community Service Employment Program would be cut, and Job Corps would be cut. There will also be some additional potential cuts to youth programs. This is a very fluid matter. We may be asked to testify at some point about the impact of these changes on our state. We can continue to be creative, innovative, and ensure that we keep our Tennessee public workforce system moving forward by continuing to look for ways to be flexible and adaptable.

A package that will include several waivers is being prepared to submit to our federal partners and hopefully that will give TN the opportunity to use more of existing funding streams. The money can be very siloed in what it can be used for, and additional flexibilities that allow us to make determinations on the different sources of dollars can help advance our agenda.

Tennessee Works – This is an incredible effort that our Governor has led the way on which brings together not just the state agencies but all partners who are engaged in workforce development, from community based organizations to Chambers to employers. An official launch of *Tennessee Works* is being planned, and we intend to be a place that is number one in the country for talent sourcing and global competitiveness. An advocacy one-pager is being developed because the *Tennessee Works* vernacular needs to be common to all of us as something we can all champion.

Apprenticeship - This is one of the areas that is not shrinking. Our state has done and continues to do a really great job on apprenticeship, and our state director Shalondria Shaw continues to lead these efforts for us. The President's Executive Order wants to get to a million apprentices across the country, and Tennessee wants to make sure that we can plant our flag in efforts to do that as well. We are going all in by crafting policies, incentives, and continuing to leverage the work that's going on with business and industry.

Decisions at the federal level are being made to streamline efficiency and effectiveness of both the dollars and the practice. Commissioner Thomas believes Tennessee is poised to be able to be an example of that across the country. She will continue to keep the board updated.

Strategic Goal: Expanded Partnerships and System Alignment

Connecting Industry and Workforce

Josh Brown, President & CEO – Tennessee Chamber of Commerce & Industry

As a statewide business organization with 700+ members, Mr. Brown noted that the Tennessee Chamber advocates for Tennessee being a strong place to do business because we have a great economic climate and great pro-business policies. The Tennessee Chamber is really about the three C's:

Connecting stakeholders together to have important conversations that help their members learn about each other and best practices

Convening conversations on important issues from solid waste to energy to housing to workforce

Collaborating in partnerships with stakeholders about resources they can bring to the table to leverage the good work that's already being done.

Their members range from large, multinational companies to small 20- to 25-person manufacturing operations in rural communities. Everyone has different needs and concerns but one thing they have in common is they want employees who are prepared and ready to work. This is a top issue for industry. Mr. Brown noted that the Tennessee Chamber wants to focus on three TDLWD initiatives to bring their strength and resources to bear to support and enhance workforce development: enhanced access to data via the dashboard, micro-credentialing, and labor market intelligence.

Be Pro Be Proud TN was highlighted as an example of what a public-private partnership can look like. This project utilizes an 18-wheeler that is outfitted with different simulators and training opportunities for high school students. The truck parks outside of high schools and highlights skills and trades available in Tennessee. If a particular company has a need for workers with a specific skill, they can talk to the Tennessee Chamber about this practical, tangible way to reach students, particularly those who do not want to pursue a four-year education path.

Mr. Brown noted that, overall, it is key that we talk about partnerships, remain flexible, refrain from complacency, and become strategic as we address workforce development in Tennessee. Commissioner Thomas publicly thanked Mr. Brown for the posture that the Tennessee Chamber has in being a good partner, and for allowing TDLWD to be a partner with *Be Pro Be Proud* which is an amazing opportunity.

Strategic Goal: Expanded Partnerships and System Alignment

Unemployment Insurance (UI) Tax Project Update

Chris Russ, Assistant Administrator – Unemployment Insurance

Charles Jansen, Director – Office of Transformation

Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD)

Mr. Russ gave an update on the UI projects. Phase 1 of their modernization project started in February 2020 with their benefits system which went live in February 2024. This system has greatly improved their efficiencies, allowing the UI division to meet their first pay timeliness metric for nine months in a row starting in May 2024. Their benefit timeliness and quality metric hasn't been met in about 12 years, and now they've met this metric for three consecutive quarters. Phase 2 is their tax modernization project. Their current system is a 40-year-old mainframe that's paper driven and has a lot of manual processes. In the next few weeks, UI is looking to upgrade this system.

Mr. Jansen reviewed the new tax system's efficiencies which include:

- One unified system as a central repository for all their tax data
- Integration with their benefits system because both are built on the same platform
- Ability to pull metrics/KPIs for data-driven tracking
- Ability for employers to see their data in one place in real time
- Largely automated, greatly reducing manual efforts
- Time savings for customers/employers, third-party administrators, and UI employees
- Simple navigation
- Overall enhanced customer experience
- Built-in fraud detection and confidentiality
- Flexibility: system enhancements and upgrades will allow for pivoting with legislative changes and technology advancements

The go-live date is Tuesday May 27. A modernization page on their website provides information on the new system benefits and links to recently held webinars. Other communications include demonstrations through emails and web banners to consistently ensure that the public is aware of the project timeline. A e-services portal has been established for employers to log in to begin using this modernized product. Employers and third party administrators have also been encouraged to register now ahead of the May 27 launch.

Committee Updates

Oversight Committee – Vice Chair Martha Axford

Ms. Axford gave the report in Chair Michelle Falcon's absence, and she complimented the staff support team for organizing them today. Mr. Brian Eardley reviewed the financials and talked about workforce development investment

from the state that has been vital in offsetting federal funding declinations. Funding levels and expenditures expected to remain consistent from prior year because of state investment. Greater focus on Wagner Peyser enrollments and staff training has yielded increased participation in the program. Focus has also been on modernizing the American Job Center system to reduce the brick and mortar footprint in favor of staff outreach and meeting people where they are. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) is expected to receive approximately \$18 million in new state appropriations for micro-credentialing, youth employment, and strategic support activities. The department also continues to explore available federal discretionary awards and has applied for a \$5.9 million apprenticeship grant.

Ms. Axford noted that Ms. Julie Johnson did a great job presenting the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) information. An interim meeting was held to discuss VR and some of the things the committee want to see with their data. Each VR client has different needs and assessments which makes it hard to consolidate their data. The three areas that VR is focused on are preparing youth for work, starting clients on the path towards employment, and helping clients meet their employment goals.

Quarterly program performance data was shared, and current challenges and opportunities were discussed. This committee is going to have another subcommittee meeting virtually in July to see what they need to discuss as a next step.

Operations Committee – Chair Stuart Price

Mr. Price also thanked their staff, including Jeremy and Rebekah, for supporting them well. Their meeting began with a review of their charter to discuss their responsibilities. As a committee, they want to ensure they are set up to fulfill their key tasks so they had robust discussion around how they will accomplish their goals. Mr. Price was excited about the future of the committee, and he thanked those who are involved in the restructuring process. He also noted they have new committee members who he is also excited about.

This committee received the following updates:

Tennessee Youth Employment Program presented by Deputy Commissioner Buddy Hoskinson - The purpose of this program is to link young adults with employers, and it targets 14 to 24 year olds. This presentation emphasized that this is not a summer program: it's a year-round program where the participants have the potential to earn up to \$4,000. In 2024, there were 4,800 enrollees with 1,200 employers. The goal for 2025 is 8,000 enrollees and the target markets include manufacturing, childcare, health care, and construction. More details are available at yeptn.com.

The Apprenticeship Council [presented by Assistant Administrator Shalondria Shaw] - We have a very strong apprenticeship program in our state, and we have an apprenticeship council that meets to review our progress on initiatives. New and expanded programs were discussed that largely target the public sector. They've seen wage increases up to 28% and an increase in participants over the past few years. There is also an expansion into rural communities. New occupations are involved in the program including K-12 teachers, and we're the first in the nation with this program. We also have student nurse apprenticeships, police officers' apprenticeships, and we're awaiting federal approval for three nuclear accredited programs in Oakridge. We have 458 registered programs in the state which certainly speaks to the effectiveness and the effort that people are investing. In 2024, there were 66 state certified pre-apprenticeships and in 2025 there are 143. We recognize there is still a lack of awareness among a large portion of our employers about apprenticeships so there's an effort to continue to address this. Some of the business incentives that we have include the Workforce Learning Management System to benefit smaller companies that provide training for apprentices, and reimbursements for training costs. Registered apprenticeships offer a strong return on investment for businesses, and studies indicate that the average ROI is \$1.44 for every dollar invested. This doesn't address the more intangible benefits they get around a properly trained and skilled workforce.

The Education and Training Workgroup presented by TDLWD Chief Strategy Officer Briana Moore - The purpose of this work group is to implement strategic data driven solutions that expand access to high-quality education and workforce development training for traditional and non-traditional students, adult learners, and employees. Their goal is to increase credential attainment and close wage gaps by aligning programs with industry needs, scaling evidence-based practices, and tracking progress through measurable outcomes. Current projects and progress include TN Works, the FutureReadyTN Portal that prepares students for work, the Oxford Visit for Apprenticeship Accelerator (an international apprenticeship program through UT), and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission Master Plan.

Innovation Committee – Chair Marshall Graves

Mr. Graves reported that this committee was pleased to welcome three members who are new to the board and this committee: David Jordan, David Stansell, and Max Goldberg.

The committee discussed their charter which is about promoting a culture that encourages innovation at our state board level. This committee is tasked with looking for and initiating partnerships between the workforce development work and other organizations in the state. As part of their charter, they can potentially launch workgroups.

This committee had the following presentations:

UTCIS Board Certification - This board is familiar with the work that's been done on the certification of this board that took place over the last couple of years. This was Phase I of the certification process and now it's time for Phase II which moves this work out to the local workforce boards. Executive Director Amy Mayberry presented the work that will go on with the local boards over the course of the next year. Phase II will be planned more fully throughout the month of June and will begin in July of this year. Basically, the idea is to use a one-year timeline to work with the local boards to identify areas where there might be recommendations for long-term or short-term change or innovation, and to close any gaps in the oversight or the operations of those boards. Ultimately each local board would receive a certification rating to show where they are in their work.

Non-Degree Credentials Framework Update - Over the last year, our work here at the state has really focused on industry certification. There is \$6.3 million in state funding that's been awarded to be administered by TDLWD. It will be provided as grants to our local boards, schools, or other agencies for non-degree credential work. These are basically short-term, stackable credentials that enable participants to advance their career. We should have a funding opportunity later this year, and this is something the board will want to be aware of and help promote across the state.

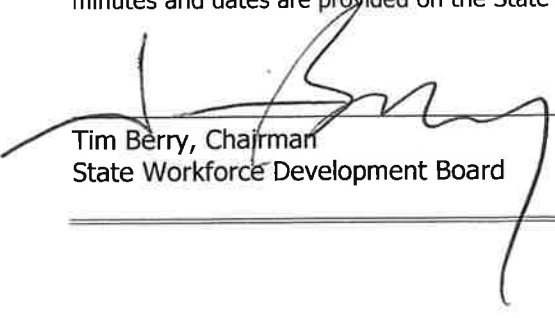
Tech 901 - This is a nonprofit, philanthropically funded organization in the Memphis area that is doing some good work in industry certification. They presented their program which has been ongoing for about 10 years, and during that time, 960 individuals in the Memphis area have been aligned with various kinds of technology industry certifications. They presented interesting numbers around the progression of participants' careers as they enter this program (maybe having no technology experience) which reflect a significant increase in opportunity and wage earnings. They expect to have about 300 new trainees in their program each year going forward and they've worked with approx. 418 employers in their market.

Closing Remarks

Tim Berry, Board Chair

Chairman Berry appreciated everybody's participation and willingness to give up their regular schedules to be a part of this board. He noted that their participation shows how important this work is to the state and how valuable Tennessee workers are to each board member. The meeting adjourned at 11:04 AM CT.

Note: An audio recording of this meeting is on file at the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development. All meeting minutes and dates are provided on the State Workforce Development Board website.



Tim Berry, Chairman
State Workforce Development Board

8-22-25
Date