



State of Tennessee State Workforce Development Board Meeting Minutes

Friday, November 14, 2025 – 10:00 AM – 11:55 AM

Board Members Present

- Jacky Akbari
- Natalie Alvarez
- Martha Axford
- Assistant Commissioner Jay Baker
- Joe Baker
- Tim Berry
- Lynda Botsch (Southern Middle)
- Josh Brown
- Designee: Policy Advisor Suzanne Carr for Commissioner Clarence Carter
- Billy Dycus
- Ben Ferguson (Southwest)
- David Jordan
- Policy Director Michael Hendrix for Governor Bill Lee
- Mayor Mike Pogreba (Northern Middle)
- Stuart Price
- Designee: Assistant Commissioner Deborah Knoll for Commissioner Lizzette Reynolds
- Lee Sloan
- Commissioner Deniece Thomas
- Will Trumm
- Jeff Vance
- Ron Wade (Greater Memphis)
- Assistant Commissioner Kevin Wright

Board Members Present by Proxy

- Jason Bates – Ben Ferguson, Proxy
- Marshall Graves (Southeast) – Lynda Botsch, Proxy
- Mayor Tim Kelly – Charita Allen, Proxy
- David Stansell – Stuart Price, Proxy

Members Absent

- Brandy Lassiter for State Senator Paul Bailey
- State Representative Clark Boyd
- Max Goldberg
- J. Paul Jackson
- Sandra Long
- Designee: Director Jennie McCabe for Commissioner Stuart McWhorter

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

Welcome and Opening Thoughts

Chairman Berry called the meeting to order and reminded members that the meeting was being livestreamed.

Roll Call

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

Governor Bill Lee – Workforce System Updates

Commissioner Thomas introduced Governor Bill Lee, who addressed the Board and thanked members for their service. Governor Lee emphasized:

1. The strategic importance of workforce development to Tennessee’s economic competitiveness.
2. The intent of Executive Order 109 to elevate and empower the Board to be more innovative, responsive, and impactful.
3. Major state investments in CTE, TCATs, and workforce infrastructure.
4. The launch of Tennessee Works as a consolidated, statewide workforce strategy.
5. Workforce availability as a decisive factor in attracting and retaining global business investment.

Chairman’s Remarks

Chairman Berry:

- Thanked members who attended the Governor’s Conference (GovCon) and the launch of Tennessee Works.
 - It was helpful to see the alignment and efficiency that’s going to be created throughout State government and through the work of this Board.
- Introduced Josh Brown, President & CEO of the Tennessee Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as a new Board member.

Workforce System Updates

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

Commissioner Thomas provided updates on:

- Executive Order 109, echoing the Governor’s comments about the importance of empowering this Board to drive the Governor’s vision at a state, regional, and local level.
- Positive reception of Tennessee Works.
- Resolution of the federal government shutdown and recall of furloughed BLS staff.
- Ongoing emphasis on partnerships and community-level workforce impact.
- Recognition of retiring Local Workforce Board Executive Directors:
 - Barbara Kizer (Southern Middle)
 - Becky Hull (Upper Cumberland)

Consent Agenda (vote required)

Motion made by Martha Axford, seconded by Jacky Akbari, and unanimously approved to accept the minutes from the August 22, 2025 meeting as presented.

Strategic Goal: Pipeline Development and Emerging Industries

Economic Outlook: Artificial Intelligence Assessment

Edward Taylor, Senior Research Associate – University of Tennessee, Boyd Center for Business & Economic Research

Key highlights of Mr. Taylor’s presentation of his work on assessing AI’s impacts and preparing the workforce:

- Definition of AI as technology that enables machines to perform cognitive tasks usually associated with humans, noting the difficulty of predicting the impact of this emerging automation.
- Overview of AI as a general-purpose technology with substitutive and complementary workforce impacts.
- Identification of occupations most exposed to AI disruption, particularly high-exposure, low-complexity middle-skill jobs.
- Discussion of growing digital and AI skill gaps nationally and in Tennessee.
- Emphasis on the need for:
 - Digital literacy as a prerequisite to AI literacy. Digital literacy was defined as using technology to find, create, organize, and communicate information (i.e. email, spreadsheets, etc.). AI literacy was defined as understanding the capabilities and limitations of AI as a tool in daily work. It includes creating queries, understanding data bias, and knowing the security and privacy risks of using AI. More specialized knowledge includes being able to make AI work with other systems in the workplace.
 - Multi-level education strategies (K-12, postsecondary, workforce training).
 - Public-private partnerships and employer-based training.
- Board discussion focused on robotics, job displacement, AI education for the Board, and integration of AI into workforce strategy.

Commissioner Thomas noted the opportunity for the Board to inventory existing AI-related initiatives and to improve Board fluency and oversight in this area.

Strategic Goal: Increase Labor Force Participation

Advancing Careers Benefits Cliffs Follow-Up

Amy Maberry, SWDB Executive Director, TDLWD

Brittany Birkin, Director/Principal Advisor | Community & Economic Development, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta

Jason Cecil, Assistant Commissioner, TDLWD

Marla Rye, Executive Director, Northern Middle Local Workforce Development Board

Key points of this presentation:

- Announcement of a pilot program integrating a Benefits Cliff Tool into American Job Centers (AJCs). The goal and key objective of this pilot is to help individuals understand and then address the financial impact of benefits cliffs.
- Pilot partners include:
 - Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta
 - Northern Middle Local Workforce Development Board
 - Martha O’Bryan Center
 - Tennessee Department of Human Services
- Pilot launch planned for Davidson County in January 2026, with statewide rollout targeted for summer 2026.
- Objectives include:
 - Increasing job seeker awareness of benefits cliffs. AJC career counselors will use the cliff tool to show the relationship between income and public benefits, noting the financial impact.
 - Supporting informed career and wage decisions. Job seekers will be guided toward career pathways that promote long-term self-sufficiency.
 - Training AJC staff through a structured “Cliff Academy.”
 - Collecting outcome data to inform future policy and service delivery.

- Board discussion emphasized:
 - Measuring outcomes and long-term impacts.
 - Potential policy solutions beyond mitigation.
 - Alignment with TANF demonstration grants.
 - Opportunities to integrate AI tools into career coaching and planning.

Committee Updates

Oversight Committee – Vice Chair Martha Axford

Reports included:

- Update from TDLWD Assistant Administrator Brooks Young on Tennessee Works employer engagement and hub staffing
- Financial overview highlighting:
 - \$49M in federal and state discretionary funds aligned to re-entry, apprenticeship, rural, and youth initiatives.

Operations Committee – Chair Stuart Price

Reports included:

- Youth Employment Program update from Jason Cecil:
 - \$11.5M budget, goal of 8,000 participants.
 - Increased cost efficiency compared to prior years.
- Inspirational participant testimonies from Gage Link and Makiya London highlighting program impact.
 - Gage Link worked for Montgomery County Government, Human Resources.
 - Makiya London interned for Monroe Harding, emphasis Social Work.
- Additional Tennessee Works update from TDLWD Assistant Administrator Brooks Young

Innovation Committee – Vice Chair Lynda Botsch

Reports included:

- Update on Local Board Certification Program from Tamera Parsons, Performance Consultant, University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service:
 - Project is currently on schedule. All three Middle Tennessee board reviews have been completed. All three West Tennessee boards reviews are in their early stages.
 - Early improvements in governance practices and communication.
 - Long-term goals include assessing opportunities to better align systems and more accurately measure the impact of local board operations.
- Tennessee Works rollout overview and next-phase staffing plans presented by TDLWD Assistant Administrator Brooks Young.

Closing Remarks

Tim Berry, Board Chair

Chairman Berry:

- Noted upcoming changes to committee and board meeting schedules to allow more substantive work.
- Expressed appreciation to Board members and staff.
- Recognized the meeting as the final Board meeting of 2025.
- Extended Thanksgiving gratitude.

The meeting adjourned at 11:55 AM.

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.

The signed document is available for inspection upon request.

Date: February 27, 2026

Signed by: Tim Berry, Chairman, State Workforce Development Board