



State of Tennessee State Workforce Development Board Meeting Minutes

Friday, May 8, 2026 – 8:30 AM to 12:40 PM

Board Members Present

- Jacky Akbari
- Martha Axford
- Assistant Commissioner Jay Baker
- Tim Berry
- Lynda Botsch (Southern Middle)
- Josh Brown*
- Assistant Commissioner Suzanne Carr
- Designee: Senior Policy Advisor Shannon Rosedale for Commissioner Clarence Carter
- Billy Dycus
- Ben Ferguson (Southwest)
- Max Goldberg
- Marshall Graves (Southeast)
- J. Paul Jackson
- David Jordan
- Sandra Long
- Designee: Director Jennie McCabe for Commissioner Stuart McWhorter
- Kelly North
- Mayor Mike Pogreba (Northern Middle)
- Stuart Price**
- Designee: Assistant Commissioner Deborah Knoll for Commissioner Lizzette Reynolds
- Lee Sloan
- David Stansell
- Commissioner Deniece Thomas
- Jeff Vance
- Ron Wade (Greater Memphis)

Board Members Present by Proxy

- Natalie Alvarez – Billy Dycus, Proxy
- Joe Baker – Marshall Graves, Proxy
- Mayor Tim Kelly – Kelly Valcarce, Proxy
- Policy Director Michael Hendrix for Governor Bill Lee – Deputy Director of Policy Chrissy Freeland, Proxy
- Will Trumm – Jamie Choate, Proxy

Board Members Absent

- Brandy Lassiter for State Senator Paul Bailey
- Jason Bates
- State Representative Clark Boyd

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

* Had a proxy until approximately 10:30 AM

**Arrived after roll call

Welcome

Chairman Berry called the meeting to order and reminded members:

- The meeting was publicly livestreamed.
- The primary purpose of the meeting was to review and vote on regional and local workforce plan modifications.
- Public comment opportunities would be provided before each vote.
- Members with conflicts of interest related to local or regional plans were reminded to abstain from voting.

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 27, 2026, meeting. It was moved by Ben Ferguson and seconded by Martha Axford to approve the minutes as presented. After asking for further discussion and hearing none, Chairman Berry called for a vote. The motion unanimously passed.

Workforce System Updates

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

Commissioner Thomas provided the following statewide workforce system updates.

Greater Memphis Fiscal Review

- Issues identified in Greater Memphis were determined to involve fiscal controls rather than fraud.
- The board's previously authorized forensic audit authority was ultimately not needed.
- Greater Memphis was temporarily placed under high-risk sanctions and fiscal drawdowns were suspended.
- All fiscal issues associated with the local board have since been satisfied and drawdowns restored.
- Because of past practice, they have been placed in the high-risk category which allows for more on-demand visits, reviews, and monitoring.
- Technical assistance will continue.
- The Greater Memphis Board and the TDLWD staff were recognized for their diligence, hard work, and the tremendous amount of time spent resolving this matter.

State Plan Modifications

- Tennessee submitted its WIOA State Plan modifications thanks to Amy Maberry, Briana Thomas, and others who worked to complete it.
- First time in workforce history that the federal government gave a tremendous amount of opportunity to innovate.
- Modifications emphasized:
 - America's Talent Strategy
 - AI integration

- Regional coordination
- AJC redesign
- Workforce innovation and modernization

CTO Challenge Application

Tennessee applied for the federal CTO (i.e., Connecting Talent to Opportunity) Challenge thanks to TDLWD AC Jay Baker along with collaborative partners our Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), Education, and others.

Goals:

- Connect learner employment records to a credential registry which gives learners the ability to take control of credential attainment
- Improve portability and employer validation of credentials
- Assess the value of these credentials to ensure congruency between employer expectations and learner skill attainment

TBR has begun this work. If successful, we would be one of the first in the country to connect learning employment records to the requirements employers are looking for, which would be a substantial step forward.

Workforce Pell Updates

- Workforce Pell implementation remains a top priority led by TDLWD AC Jay Baker along with partners in the Tennessee High Education Commission (THEC), TBR, University of Tennessee, and SCORE.
- Partners are working together to refine a policy to roll out short-term Pell.
- July 1, 2026, remains the target “go live” date pending final federal guidance.
- Tennessee continues positioning itself as an early national leader in Workforce Pell implementation.

TNWorks Expansion

- Brooks Young introduced as Executive Director of TNWorks, a multi-agency collaborative that serves as a gateway to Tennessee business engagement.
- Tennessee continues to receive requests from other states requesting to replicate this employer engagement model.
- Deputy Governor and Commissioner McWhorter, the ECD team, Chancellor Tidings, Director Gentile, Commissioner Reynolds, Commissioner Carter, and others were acknowledged and thanked.
- Additional assistant executive directors were announced.
- Regional business workforce directors are being aligned under TNWorks.

Upcoming Workforce Events

- TDLWD inaugural WorkSource Summit scheduled for May 12-13, 2026.
- Tennessee was selected to host the National Governors Association Summer Workforce Policy Institute on August 18-19, 2026.

Regional and Local Plan Presentations: Overview of the Day

Amy Maberry, SWDB Executive Director, TDLWD

SWDB Executive Director Maberry provided procedural and strategic guidance regarding:

- Mid-cycle regional and local workforce plan modifications
- Alignment requirements with state strategy and America's Talent Strategy
- The review process for each plan involved 29 TDLWD cross-departmental staff members who assessed:
 - Strategic alignment
 - Programmatic compliance
 - Fiscal and Governance accountability
 - Local required policies
 - Two-year budget projections
- Approval categories:
 - Approve
 - Approve with Conditions
 - Deny
- Approval status recommendations:
 - Based on a lengthy scoresheet where any deficiencies or responses that needed to be strengthened were listed
 - Scoresheets were shared with regional planning councils and local boards
 - Recipients worked in partnership with TDLWD staff to resolve deficiencies

The SWDB evaluated whether regional and local plans clearly operationalized the state strategic vision. Each plan required a roll call vote.

East Regional Plan (vote required)

(Southeast, Northeast, and East LWDAs)

Presenters: Dr. Jennifer Thacker, Business and Workforce Director – TDLWD, Southeast TN

Brian Decker, Business and Workforce Director - TDLWD, Northeast TN

Key themes:

- Focused on sectors that drive both economic growth and opportunity: advanced manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, technology, construction, and energy
 - Aligning funding, training programs, and employer engagement strategies around identified sectors
 - Prioritizing ETPL programs, targeting outreach through Tennessee Works, and focusing on high impact occupations within each sector
 - Employer-led sector partnerships and task forces
 - Nuclear workforce development
 - Alignment between planning council and all workforce development boards
- Building clear pathways into sector careers
 - Stackable credentials starting with short-term certifications
 - Actively aligning training programs and academic pathways with evolving industry demands
 - Work-based learning is at the core: expanded apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, on the job training, and incumbent worker training
- Service delivery moving from fragmented programs to a coordinated regional system

- Adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs are aligned through shared strategies like co-enrollment and unified case management
- Work-based learning is embedded directly into American Job Center services
- Benefits cliff tool implementation in 2026
- Plan is grounded in accountability: clear goals are tied to metrics and performance reviews

After the presentation, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by Lynda Botsch and seconded by Jacky Akbari to approve the East Tennessee Regional Plan. The motion passed [28 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention, and 4 absences].

Southeast Local Plan (vote required)

Presenter: Dr. Jennifer Thacker, Business and Workforce Director - TDLWD, Southeast TN

Highlights:

- This plan modification represents a shift from a program centered approach to a sector-driven employer-led system aligned with regional demand.
- Key strategies include expanding work-based learning, strengthening co-enrollment and integrated service delivery, scaling mobile and virtual access, aligning business engagement through Tennessee Works, and increasing braided funding.
- Success depends on a strong coordinated workforce ecosystem which includes alignment with:
 - Education partners including CTE, TCATs, community colleges, and adult education providers to align training with industry demand.
 - Business and Industry through Chambers and Manufacturing Associations to connect workforce strategies to regional growth and business expansion.
 - Employers through sector task forces to help define skills, validate credentials, and shape training pathways.

Key initiatives:

- 1) expanding mobile and virtual service delivery through the AJC
- 2) scaling work-based learning across sectors including on the job training, incumbent worker training, pre-apprenticeships, and registered apprenticeship programs
- 3) implementing the benefits cliff tool in 2026 to support informed career making decisions
- 4) expanding services for justice involved individuals and
- 5) growing youth engagement with YEP.

Success will be measured by monitoring outcomes, improving efficiencies, and enhancing service delivery for job seekers and businesses.

After the presenter answered questions from the SWDB, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by Jennie McCabe and seconded by Ben Ferguson to approve the Southeast Local Workforce Board Plan. The motion passed [28 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention, and 4 absences].

Northeast Local Plan (vote required)

Presenter: Brian Vaughn, Program Services & Performance Coordinator, Northeast LWDB

Highlights:

- Plan modifications are designed to close the gap in their labor force participation rate

- Modifications include 1) requiring employer validation before any WIOA training investment, 2) prioritizing work-based learning: OJT, registered apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeships are the default, 3) launching virtual appointments and mobile units, 4) routing everyone enrolled in their national dislocated worker grant program to their sector pipelines, 5) YEP expansion, and 6) adding four local metrics beyond federal reporting
- Launching AI literacy micro-badge program
- Healthcare and advanced manufacturing represent priority sectors that are hiring. CDL drivers are also needed.
- Actively serving the justice-involved population
- Excited about the launch of the TN benefits cliff dashboard

After the presenter answered questions from the SWDB, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by Marshall Graves and seconded by Ron Wade to approve the Northeast Local Workforce Board Plan. The motion passed [30 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention, and 2 absences. Upon further review there were 30 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions, and 3 absences].

East Local Plan (vote required)

Presenter: EL Morton, Executive Director, East LWDB

Highlights:

- Strategic vision is to connect all residents — especially youth and individuals with barriers to employment — to meaningful career pathways, industry-valued credentials, and economic self-sufficiency
- Active multi-agency engagement across education, economic development, industry, and core WIOA partners
- Major focus on nuclear workforce growth; East TN has unique statewide advantage
- Expansion of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship pipelines
- Rural broadband expansion and mobile workforce delivery strategies
- Veterans' housing/workforce initiative
- Accelerate federal, state, and county inmates into good jobs with PROWD and CRRG grants
- Workforce Pell integration allows shorter 30-, 60-, and 90-day training programs
- New and exciting partners on the economic development side
- Accountability and integration are paramount

After the presenter answered questions from the SWDB, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by J. Paul Jackson and seconded by Sandra Long to approve the East Local Workforce Board Plan. The motion passed [30 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions, and 3 absences].

Middle Regional Plan (vote required)

(Northern Middle, Upper Cumberland, and Southern Middle LWDAs)

Presenters: Selina Moore, Business & Workforce Director, Southern Middle LWDA

Nestor Reyes, Business & Workforce Director, Northern Middle LWDA

Key themes:

- State aligned priority sectors are advanced manufacturing, health care, logistics, construction; regionally significant sectors include hospitality and tourism, educational services, and nuclear (emerging)
- Sector strategy leadership includes their Regional Planning Council, and partnerships with employers, educational institutions, industrial boards, and Chambers of Commerce
- Middle TN Regional Workforce System brings together partners across education, economic development, and human services to deliver coordinated, employer-responsive services.
- Developing of new Hospitality & Tourism Task Force
- Creating a Utility District Council to develop customized training
- AI and digital upskilling emphasis across industry sectors
- Expansion of work-based learning opportunities; bridging post-secondary classroom education with real-world experience through apprenticeships, internships, and employer partnerships
- Integrated service delivery includes regional implementation of Benefits Cliff Tool, and providing wrap-around services to address employment barriers
- Measuring impact by defining metrics, tracking and reporting, and continuous improvement

After the presenters answered questions from the SWDB, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by David Stansell and seconded by Stuart Price to approve the Middle Tennessee Regional Plan. The motion passed [28 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 abstentions, and 3 absences].

Northern Middle Local Plan (vote required)

Presenters: Marla Rye, Executive Director Northern Middle LWDB

Ferrol Thomas, THA Industry Association Partner

Freda Herndon, Title II Adult Education Partner

Highlights:

- Plan Modifications include:
 - Strengthening Partnerships with Industry Associations
 - Closure of eight AJC centers and transition to regionalized/mobile model
 - Alignment between AJCs, Adult Education, Secondary, and TBR Institutions
- Mobile app development reducing intake time from 120 minutes to 20 minutes
- Significant adult education partnership
- Healthcare incumbent worker training partnerships;
- Developing apprenticeship and youth employment programs; pathway development for high school students to graduate with their LPN license

After the presenters answered questions from the SWDB, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by Ben Ferguson and seconded by Martha Axford to approve the Northern Middle Local Workforce Board Plan. The motion passed [29 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention, and 3 absences].

Upper Cumberland Local Plan (vote required)

Presenter: Ryan Barnhart, Executive Director, Upper Cumberland LWDB

Highlights:

- Increase labor force participation rate by targeting underutilized populations
 - Expanded justice-involved workforce strategies
 - Recovery-friendly workplace initiatives
- Local workforce system aligned around business demands and needs; includes collaboration with business and industry, education and training partners, community organizations, and system integration
- Work First model to accelerate transition from assistance to employment
- Work-based learning will be the primary model
- Apprenticeships, incumbent worker training, and rural healthcare initiatives
- Expansion of Rivet virtual reality career exploration
- Career Pathway Pro AI predictive navigation system

After the presenter answered questions from the SWDB, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by Martha Axford and seconded by Ron Wade to approve the Upper Cumberland Local Workforce Board Plan. The motion passed [30 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions, and 3 absences].

Southern Middle Local Plan (vote required)

Presenter: Ashley Clevenger, Executive Director, Southern Middle LWDB

Highlights:

- Rural area with thirteen counties
- Local plan modifications include:
 - AJC Redesign and Virtu Service Model - Virtual AJC redesign for rural populations to take a job seeker from intake through credential attainment and job placement
 - TNWorks Business Engagement Integration – Focusing on industry-driven strategies
 - Expanded State Registered Apprenticeship - Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship expansion; moving beyond traditional construction trades to diversify into advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and logistics
 - Rural Healthcare Workforce - Pipeline expansion is the most significant initiative; need to fill clinical positions at every level; includes a stackable CNA to RN pathway with work-based learning placements at healthcare partners.
 - YEP Year-Round and Reentry Pathways - Youth employment expansion with intentional emphasis ages 14-16; Currently serving justice-involved individuals and will pursue re-entry grant funding
 - Federal and state investments braided to maximize impact

After the presenter answered a question from the SWDB, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by Jacky Akbari and seconded by Jeff Vance to approve the Southern Middle Local Workforce Board Plan. The motion passed [29 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention, and 3 absences].

West Regional Plan (vote required)

(Greater Memphis, Northwest, and Southwest LWDAs)

Presenters: Dr. Sabra Bledsoe, Assistant Administrator, TDLWD

Roderick Woody, Business & Workforce Director, Greater Memphis LWDA

Key themes:

- Regional coordination across all West Tennessee local areas
- Competitive Focus
 - SQL and AI literacy programs to meet growing demand for data-driven roles across industries
 - Stackable, employer-recognized credentials that accelerate hiring and wage growth
 - TNWorks implementation and unified employer engagement
- Industry-aligned career pathways for priority sectors including healthcare, advanced manufacturing, transportation and logistics, construction, food accommodations and retail
- Expansion of healthcare and skilled trades apprenticeships
- Integrated service delivery, alignment across LWDAs, and virtual/mobile services; Integrated service delivery and workforce mobility will provide a “no wrong door” approach to AJC services which will include orientation, labor exchange or internal referral, and job placement.
- Defining success by real movement in outcomes: more job placements, higher wages, higher training completion rates, and employer impact

After the presentation, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by Jeff Vance and seconded by Josh Brown to approve the West Tennessee Regional Plan. The motion passed [27 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 abstentions, and 4 absences].

Greater Memphis Local Plan (vote required)

Presenter: Melody Freeman, Executive Director, Greater Memphis LWDB

Highlights:

- Fully Integrated Workforce System which includes Education; Economic Development; Employers and Industry Groups; Community Based Organizations and Service Delivery Partners; Philanthropic and Strategic Investment Partners; Workforce, Training, and Innovation Partners; and Core WIOA Partners
- Major Plan Modifications:
 - Transition from logistics-driven growth to digital infrastructure economy
 - Expansion of AI, IT, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing sectors
 - Employer demand for digitally skilled talent and industry credentials
 - New partnerships supporting data center technology workforce pipelines
- Training Provider Dashboard will measure value, training quality, placement in field of study, starting wage outcomes, and credential attainment completion
- Investing in People: Building the talent pipelines
 - Majority of funding targeted for career service providers, participant services, and direct investments
 - The economic impact of investing in youth and creative talent has been measured; implementing a youth creative workforce pipeline
- Key initiatives and strategic investments prioritize industry-aligned training and barrier removal

After the presenter answered questions from the SWDB, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by Billy Dycus and seconded by Sandra Long to approve the Greater Memphis Local Workforce Board Plan. The motion passed [27 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 abstentions, and 4 absences].

Northwest Local Plan (vote required)

Presenter: Jennifer Bane, Executive Director, Northwest LWDB and Southwest LWDB

Highlights:

- One of the smallest areas: nine counties that are entirely rural
- Local plan modification strategies include industry driven strategies and worker mobility
- Strategic Initiatives:
 - Healthcare Career Exploration – (Baptist Memorial Hospitals, Priority Ambulance, community colleges, and area high schools) Industry-led youth talent pipeline initiative promoting high-demand occupations and related training opportunities to promote workforce participation and retain local talent
 - Construction Pre-Apprenticeship – (Amteck) Four weeks of classroom training and paid work experience with an opportunity to obtain employment and entry into the Registered Apprenticeship program to become a Journeyman / Licensed Electrician
- Reduced AJC infrastructure, expanded partner co-locations, access points, and virtual access
- ETPL and work-based learning alignment with priority sectors and industry-recognized credentials
- Training and support services to promote workforce participation and mobility
- Impact measures have been identified to determine whether the “workforce needle” is moving
- Shared staffing and regional alignment with Southwest

After the presentation, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by Mike Pogreba and seconded by Kelly North to approve the Northwest Local Workforce Board Plan. After some discussion, the motion passed [26 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 abstentions, and 4 absences. Upon further review, there were 26 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 abstentions, and 5 absences].

Southwest Local Plan (vote required)

Presenter: Jennifer Bane, Executive Director, Northwest LWDB and Southwest LWDB

Highlights:

- Two distressed counties and three at-risk counties in this area
- Shared regional operations with Northwest; Local plan modification strategies include integrated systems regional alignment with Northwest, and accountability tied to outcomes
- Board standing committees replicate Northwest structure and include an American Job Center Committee, an Outreach and Opportunities Committee, and an Executive Committee
- Strategic Initiatives:
 - Industry-led justice-involved manufacturing training initiatives to promote workforce participation; funding through CRRG
 - Rural healthcare training shared grant with Northwest for regional alignment across rural West TN and streamlined administration; primarily focused on enhancing existing programs and expanding access to promote worker mobility
- Service Integration and Talent Mobility next steps
 - Support AJC redesign and regional hubs
 - Identify and prioritize short-term, stackable credentials
 - More focus on supportive services and implementation of Benefits CLIFF tool

- Performance accountability includes ROI on initiatives and operational efficiency

After the presenter answered a question from the SWDB, it was noted that there was no public comment.

Board action: It was moved by Lynda Botsch and seconded by J. Paul Jackson to approve the Southwest Local Workforce Board Plan. The motion passed [27 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention, and 5 absences].

Closing Remarks

Tim Berry, Board Chair

Chairman Berry thanked all presenters, staff, and board members for completing all regional and local plan reviews. He announced two topics that will be included in the August 2026 meeting agenda: the AJC redesign and the Benefits Cliff Tool update. The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:40 PM.

Audio Recording

An audio recording of this meeting is on file at the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

Meeting Minutes

These minutes were signed August 28, 2026, by Tim Berry, Chairman of the State Workforce Development Board.

The signed document is available for inspection upon request.

All meeting minutes and dates are provided on the State Workforce Development Board website.