

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD DISABILITIES COMMITTEE

Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, CHAIRWOMAN
MEETING: May 13, 2025 10:00AM via Zoom

Committee Members

1. Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, In Road to Opportunities
2. Marc Schweitzer, NJDVRs Business Outreach Team
3. Nasrene Mondol, American Job Center
4. Dr. Reinaldo Santiago- Herreno, Arc of Union County
5. Lindsay Rawls, Goodwill Industries NYNJ
6. Lauren Weishaar, Hudson Community Enterprises
7. Carla Donegan, NJ HESAA
8. Walter Droz, Salvation Army
9. Josh Bornstein, Union County ESC Work Readiness Academy
10. Nadia Ritter, Hudson Community Enterprises
11. Grace Inoa, Hudson Community Enterprises

Union County Workforce Development Staff

Meredith Barracato

Meeting Summary

Welcome & Introductions: Chairwoman Cyndy Walsh Rintzler welcomed attendees to the Union County Workforce Development Board Disabilities Committee meeting. She noted that it was the committee's second meeting of the year, following a previous one held in January. She thanked everyone for taking time out of their schedules to attend, listen to updates, and provide feedback.

Approval of January 14, 2025 Meeting Minutes: The meeting minutes from January 14, 2025 were unanimously approved. Marc Schweitzer made the motion to approve, which was seconded by Josh Bornstein. The minutes were approved unanimously with no comments or corrections.

Standing Items:

Budget: Meredith Barracato reported that for Program Year 2023, just over \$1 million remained in the budget as of the last board meeting held in April. She noted that for Program Year 2024, the Workforce Development Board had been actively pursuing several grants to benefit Union County. One such grant was the Adult Literacy Innovations grant, which awarded \$500,000 to support ESL training and workforce readiness services for individuals needing to upgrade their skills.

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Another recently pursued grant was the Summer Youth Work Experience Program, which could be particularly useful for those on the call seeking summer employment opportunities for their clients. Recruitment for the program was already underway across the county. United Way of Greater Union County was leading enrollment efforts countywide, while the City of Elizabeth was enrolling youth specifically from Elizabeth. Both entities were preparing participants through orientations focused on first-time job readiness, such as punctuality, proper dress, and employer communication. Additionally, students would participate in a work readiness workshop designed to prepare them for their six-week job placement. Each participant would receive a stipend of up to \$3,400, offering many of them their first work experience.

Meredith stated that after the meeting, she would circulate a flyer from United Way of Greater Union County to help committee members sign up youth for the program. Josh Bornstein commented that he had attempted to connect with Adrian at United Way a few weeks prior to gather more information. He expressed interest in promoting the program through Union County ESC and supporting student participation but noted they needed further details to move forward.

In response, Meredith offered to send Josh the necessary information and include an introductory email to United Way. She also extended the offer to anyone else interested in either enrolling students or serving as a host site for the program. She mentioned that the program was also working with various employers and community partners to provide placement opportunities for the participating youth.

Performance Data: Meredith Barracato presented the performance data for the first two quarters of Program Year 2024, noting that the information was on a lag and covered activity only through January 31. The data reflected individuals who entered the One-Stop system and received training services, including occupational training, ESL, or soft skills training. It specifically tracked whether those individuals gained employment six or twelve months after completing their training and exiting the program.

She explained that in the adult category—where most individuals served by committee members' organizations would fall—38 participants were exited, and 21 of them were found to be employed six months later. Additionally, of the 39 individuals exited and tracked for 12 months, 23 had found employment. Meredith emphasized the goal of improving performance metrics so that all indicators reflect positive outcomes, moving from red or yellow to green across the board.

She also shared data on customer flow at the American Job Center, stating that 2,377 individuals enrolled in some type of service. These services included job search

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assistance, resume help, or training, indicating a strong level of engagement with the One-Stop system. Out of the more than 2,000 individuals who came in, 43 were enrolled in a training program as of July 2024.

Unemployment Data: Meredith Barracato presented the latest unemployment data for Union County, reflecting trends over the past 12 months. She explained that the unemployment rate had fluctuated throughout the year, remaining relatively steady around 4.5% from September through December 2024. However, in recent months, the rate had begun to rise, influenced by inflation concerns and broader labor market trends. She noted that this upward trend was concerning and warranted continued monitoring.

Meredith added that for the next committee meeting, she would attempt to gather updated unemployment data from NTIDE specifically focusing on individuals with disabilities. She emphasized that typically, when the general unemployment rate increases, a similar increase is observed among individuals with disabilities, highlighting the importance of tracking this segment of the population closely.

Labor Market Information Meredith Barracato shared an overview of labor market information for Union County, noting that while she typically reviews local employer hiring trends, in-demand skills, and job posting locations during this portion of the meeting, she would instead upload that report to the committee's shared Google Drive. She highlighted a new tool developed by the Burning Glass Institute called Jobsthat Mobilize, which helps individuals identify entry-level jobs and outlines the skills and pathways needed to transition into better-paying roles. Using real-time job posting data, the tool illustrates career progression, such as moving from a cashier to a customer service representative, and outlines the necessary skill-building steps to support that advancement.

Meredith then transitioned to discuss three recent executive orders that could significantly impact individuals with disabilities. She invited feedback and encouraged open discussion. The first executive order involved dismantling the U.S. Department of Education and transferring responsibilities related to individuals with disabilities to the Department of Health and Human Services. Meredith raised concerns about the implications of this shift, particularly the potential loss of educational focus, weaker legal protections, and increased confusion for families navigating post-secondary transitions

The second executive order, issued in January, eliminated diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives. Meredith explained that the rollback of these initiatives could result in employers being less committed to providing

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accommodations and inclusive hiring practices. She added that there could be fewer training programs and less funding available to support individuals with disabilities, as merit-based hiring becomes the central focus.

Cyndy Walsh Rintzler added that major organizations such as Disability Rights NJ, the NJCDD, and the Boggs Center had received significant budget cuts. She mentioned that Disability Rights NJ had even shut down temporarily due to these funding issues, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of critical services and trainings for the disability community.

Valerie Kerrigan echoed these concerns, noting that there was growing anxiety within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). She reported hearing that future cuts might target disability-related programs and explained that DVR funding is federally rooted in the 1918 Soldiers Act, which would require an act of Congress to change. Valerie emphasized the importance of monitoring decisions from the Office of Management and Budget at the federal level, as those decisions could directly impact the flow of DVR funds to the states. Despite the federal rollback of DEIA, she reassured the committee that in New Jersey, the Law Against Discrimination (LAD) remains stronger than federal law and would continue to provide civil rights protections. She urged members to ensure that the people they serve are aware of their right to seek support through the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights.

Meredith thanked Valerie for her insight and transitioned to the third executive order, which addressed the rollback of equal employment protections. She noted that although New Jersey's laws remain strong, the federal changes were concerning and likely to result in increased litigation. The loss of affirmative action goals and weakened accountability mechanisms could affect many of the programs the committee supports. She closed this portion by inviting any final questions or comments and confirmed she would send out the slide deck after the meeting.

Committee Comment/Updates:

Josh Bornstein announced that Project SEARCH would be hosting a reverse job fair at Overlook Medical Center on Thursday, the 15th, from 10:00 AM to 11:30 AM. He explained the reverse job fair format, where interns set up tables to showcase their skills and experiences while employers circulate to engage with them, potentially leading to job opportunities or informal interviews. Josh encouraged anyone interested to reach out to him and mentioned that some county representatives, including Commissioner Granados, were expected to attend. He agreed to share a flyer for the event and later uploaded it to the chat for immediate access.

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Cyndy Walsh Rintzler shared that Inroads would be hosting an event the same Thursday afternoon featuring State Senator Joe Cryan, Commissioner Granados, local Roselle officials, and other dignitaries. The purpose of the event was to educate participants about public service and civic engagement. The county would be providing voting booths to help participants understand the voting process and register to vote if they hadn't already. She noted that participants would receive hands-on experience with the voting machines as part of the event.

Carla Donegan introduced herself from HESAA and responded to Valerie Kerrigan's earlier comments about connecting with the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights. Carla said she had a passionate contact within that office and would share her information in the chat. Later, she also shared details about the guest speaker scheduled for the next committee meeting—Beth DePerna, head of Orchard Friends School in Riverton, NJ. Carla described it as a micro school with a unique and innovative transition program for multi-dimensional students and emphasized the value of hearing from Beth.

Committee Adjournment: Chairwoman Rintzler concluded by thanking all attendees and noted she looked forward to hearing from the speaker for the July meeting.