

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, June 11, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

Board Members Present

Stan Robinson Jr., SHR Marketing, LLC (**Chair**)
Debbie Ann Anderson, Union County Department of Human Services (Karen Dinsmore)
Melynda Disla, Gateway Family YMCA (Collen Clayton)
Erich Peter, Union County Economic Development Corp (**Vice President**)
Gwen Ryan, Union County Vocational Technical School
Roshan White, UA Local 24 Plumbers (Chadrick Garris)
Dr. Margaret McMenamin, Union College of Union County, NJ (Marlene Loff)
Valerie Kerrigan, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Hilary McCarron, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
Danielle Johnson, JCT Solutions
Bernadette Griswold, Community Access Unlimited (Sandra Lynch)
Juanito Chiluisa, NJ Department of Labor
Craig Coughlin, Kean University
Teresa Soto-Vega, PROCEED (Srabanti Sarkar)
Timothy McConway, Steamfitters Local 475
Daryl Palmieri, Union County Schools K-12
Dr. Kamran Tasharofi, Union County Healthcare Associates
Morgan Thompson, Prevention Links (Dominique Garrett)

Board Members Absent:

James R. Brady, The Savor Group
Paul Belardo, KML Carpenters
Gloria Dunham, Qunnection Management
Alan Rutan, Rutan Mechanical LLC
Richard Capac, Crowne Property Management (**Secretary**)
Curry Bucu, Trinitas Regional Medical Center
Courtney Villani, Villani Bus

General Counsel:

Kraig Dowd, Weber Dowd Law

County of Union:

Ed Oatman, County Manager
Antonio Rivera, Workforce Development Board
Meredith Barracato, Workforce Development Board
Gina Tuesta, Workforce Development Board
Lisa Bonanno, Workforce Development Board
Robert Croom, Union County American Job Center
Melissa Lespinasse, Union County Department of Human Services
Lillian Roman, Union County American Job Center
Nasrene Mondol, Union County American Job Center
Jeffrey Jackson, Union County Department of Human Services

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Rhonda McClain, Union County Division of Social Services

Guests:

Christina Lorenzo, NJ Department of Labor
Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County
Bethany Freeland, United Way of Greater Union County
Isaias Rivera, UCNJ, Union College of Union County, NJ
Julio Sabater, Workforce Advantage
Sabrina Sabater, Workforce Advantage
Amrish Patel MD, AFC Urgent Care
Nicole Fonseca-Paz, AFC Urgent Care
Ingrid Macias, NJ Department of Labor Veteran Services
Isabel Jimenez, NJ Department of Labor WFNJ
Carol Serrano, DVRS

I. Call to Order & Welcome

The meeting was called to order by Stan Robinson, Chairman of the Workforce Development Board, at 9:05AM.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America was recited.

III. Open Public Meetings Act

Meredith Barracato read the Open Public Meetings Act Statement below into the record:

PURSUANT TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF N.J.S.A. 10:4-10 OF THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT, ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD HAS BEEN GIVEN BY MAILING THE YEAR 2025 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE TO THE NEWSPAPERS CIRCULATING WITHIN THE COUNTY OF UNION AND DESIGNATED TO RECEIVE SUCH NOTICE, AND BY POSTING THE YEAR 2025 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE IN THE COUNTY COURT HOUSE, THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD WEBSITE, AND BY FILING THE YEAR 2025 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE WITH THE OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK.

FURTHERMORE, ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THE LOCATION OF THIS MEETING HAS BEEN GIVEN BY PROVIDING AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT HOUR NOTICE TO THE NEWSPAPERS CIRCULATING WITHIN THE COUNTY OF UNION AND DESIGNATED TO RECEIVE SUCH NOTICE AND BY POSTING THE SAID NOTICE AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS PRIOR TO THIS MEETING IN THE COURT HOUSE, THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD WEBSITE, AND BY FILING THE NOTICE AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS IN ADVANCE OF THIS MEETING WITH OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK.

THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT STATEMENT SHALL BE ENTERED IN FULL IN THE MINUTES OF THIS MEETING.

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IV. Roll Call

Meredith Barracato conducted the roll-call of the Union County Workforce Development Board members in attendance. Union County employees present and guests were acknowledged on the record, as reflected on page one and two of these minutes.

V. Approval of the Minutes

The minutes of the April 9, 2025 meeting were presented for a vote.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Dr. Kamran Tasharofi made a motion to approve the meeting minutes for April 9, 2025. **Erich Peter** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

VI. UCWDB Report

Director Rivera's presentation focused on several key updates concerning workforce development in Union County. He began by noting that the unemployment rate in the county stood at 4.4% as of May 2025, which was above the national and New Jersey averages. He provided a brief overview of the status of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), stating that the law had expired and was currently under congressional review. Although a reauthorization vote had been anticipated as part of a larger budget bill in December, it did not move forward and remains in limbo.

In terms of funding, he explained that no official Notice of Award had been received yet for the new fiscal year beginning July 1. As a temporary measure, the New Jersey Department of Labor had authorized local areas to carry over existing program funds into the first quarter. As such, the resolutions presented at the board meeting were all related to this interim budget strategy, covering staffing, the American Job Center (AJC), and partner programs.

Director Rivera reviewed the budget status through April 30, highlighting that Program Year 2023 funds were nearly depleted due to prior transfers into the current year. Most of the Program Year 2024 funds remained unexpended but were already committed through contracts particularly a significant portion tied to the WIOA Summer Youth Employment Program.

Tim McConway reflected on the significance of the Summer Youth Employment Program, sharing that when he was younger, programs like this allowed kids in the City of Elizabeth to work in playgrounds and earn some spending money. He emphasized that while the pay wasn't much at the time, it made a meaningful difference helping families and giving young people a sense of responsibility and contribution. He noted that the program not only benefited the youth but also relieved some financial pressure on parents. Tim McConway reaffirmed the

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importance of the program to the community, highlighting its positive impact both then and now.

Director Rivera then provided updates on training expenditures. The American Job Center had increased its spending on Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), disbursing approximately \$150,000 from March to May, bringing the total to \$300,000. This demonstrated significant progress in connecting clients to training opportunities. Director Rivera noted that the number of individuals currently enrolled in training through the AJC had grown from around 30 in February to approximately 150.

Regarding performance metrics, he acknowledged that United Way's recent efforts to manage the youth program were still too new to be reflected in system data but were expected to make a visible impact soon. Additionally, Director Rivera pointed out that participation in training services had increased meaningfully since February.

Finally, he addressed the Workforce New Jersey participation rate, revealing that Union County's rate stood at 7.5%, far below the state's 50% requirement. This rate measures the share of TANF recipients who are engaged in required activities. Director Rivera closed this portion by indicating that while progress had been made in training enrollment, further efforts were needed to meet participation targets and ensure compliance with federal standards.

VII. WIOA Youth Services Provider

Juanita Vargas and Bethany Freeland provided an update on the 2025 Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and WIOA youth initiatives. A total of 485 youth will be enrolled—300 through the City of Elizabeth and 185 through United Way. Efforts were made to match youth, ages 16–24, with job placements aligned to their career interests, including roles such as administrative assistants, counselors, and outreach workers. Youth would earn up to \$3,400 over the summer. United Way hired additional staff to support the program and implemented electronic systems for timekeeping and payment via debit cards.

Orientation sessions were scheduled for June 30, followed by two days of employment readiness workshops covering financial literacy, workplace expectations, healthy habits, and community engagement. All 485 participants would take part. Workshops were supported by volunteers from local banks, HR professionals, and nutritionists. Youth would also be introduced to services available through the One-Stop Career Center to further connect them to career pathways and wraparound support.

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Freeland shared updates on year-round in-school and out-of-school youth services. United Way delivered mentoring, tutoring, and leadership development, including a new Alpha Prep mentorship in Plainfield and entrepreneurship training through partners like Lead Soar and Learn Up. Across programs, 116 youth achieved measurable skill gains, 62 earned credentials (e.g., CPR, diplomas, IC3), and 21 secured employment or enrollment in education or training programs. Earth Day service projects and business pitch competitions added hands-on experience and community engagement.

Simon Youth Academy saw 23 students earn high school diplomas, with several enrolling in Union College or securing full-time jobs. Exit plans for all graduating youth had been finalized, and efforts continued to ensure proper documentation for performance tracking. Upcoming events included a Youth Corps graduation, the SYEP kickoff, and United Way's annual Youth Festival, a resource fair aimed at increasing youth awareness of community services and postsecondary opportunities.

Chairman Robinson asked for clarification on the certifications being offered. In response, it was confirmed that CPR referred to resuscitation training, while IC3 is a computer literacy certification covering programs like Microsoft Word and Excel, aimed at preparing youth with essential digital skills for the workplace.

Director Rivera added that the upcoming summer program would include approximately 500 youth participants and emphasized that there were no eligibility requirements beyond being a Union County resident. He noted that United Way would handle all data collection, which presents a valuable opportunity to connect with a new pool of youth and raise awareness about the broader services United Way offers.

VIII. **Resolutions of the UCWDB**

Director Rivera transitioned the conversation to the review the resolutions. Meredith Barracato reviewed the following resolutions.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-20

**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
AUTHORIZING ADOPTING THE PROGRAM YEAR 2025 QUARTER ONE BUDGET OF THE
UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREA.**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-20**. **Dr. Kamran Tasharofi** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-20**. **Gwen Ryan** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**BOARD
ACTION**

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RESOLUTION NO. 2025-21

RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AUTHORIZING THE EXTENSION OF THE AGREEMENT WITH THE UNION COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES THROUGH SEPTEMBER 30, 2025, AND AUTHORIZING THE USE OF PROGRAM YEAR 2024 CARRY-OVER FUNDS IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$340,488.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-21**. **Dr. Kamran Tasharofi** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-21**. **Melynda Disla** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Karen Dinsmore abstained from **RESOLUTION NO. 2025-21**.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-22

RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AUTHORIZING THE TRANSFER OF WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA) EXPENSES FROM PROGRAM YEAR 2024 TO PROGRAM YEAR 2023.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-22**. **Dr. Kamran Tasharofi** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-22**. **Danielle Johnson** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-23

RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AMENDING AGREEMENT WITH UCNJ, UNION COLLEGE OF UNION COUNTY, NJ TO REVISE WIOA FUNDING ACCOUNT ALLOCATIONS.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-23**. **Erich Peter** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-23**. **Hilary McCarron** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Marlene Loff, Dr. Kamran Tasharofi, and Daryl Palmieri abstained from **RESOLUTION NO. 2025-23**

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-24

RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TO EXTEND CONTRACTS WITH UCNJ, UNION COLLEGE OF UNION COUNTY, NJ AND WORKFORCE ADVANTAGE FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY SERVICES.

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Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-24**. **Hilary McCarron** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-24**. **Timothy McConway** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Marlene Loff, Dr. Kamran Tasharofi, and Daryl Palmieri abstained from **RESOLUTION NO. 2025-24**.

Chairman Robinson mentioned that Director Rivera had emailed audio summaries of the resolutions to the board. He encouraged members to listen to them for a quick overview, noting that he did so himself on the way to the meeting. He joked about not yet figuring out how to speed up the playback to 1.5x but said the feature was very useful.

IX. American Job Center Report

Melissa Lespinasse, speaking on behalf of Director Debbie Ann Anderson from the Department of Human Services, delivered the Operator's Report. She noted that the American Job Center (AJC) team was well-prepared and had been working closely with the operator on both performance and contractual improvements.

Jeffrey Jackson reported on the May 19 American Job Center Operators Committee meeting, which focused on improving workforce outcomes, accountability, and service delivery. The committee developed key performance indicators (KPIs) for adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs to guide staff, site leaders, and partner agencies. They also created customer and employer surveys and an AJC network report card to support continuous improvement and strengthen relationships with both job seekers and employers.

Jeffrey Jackson introduced a new integrated service delivery model emphasizing universal intake, functional team structures, and streamlined referral processes. As a next step, the committee planned a mock integration test to simulate the client experience and identify service gaps. These simulations would be conducted regularly to refine customer flow and improve the quality of services across the AJC network.

Robert Croom provided an update on American Job Center activities, highlighting efforts to engage job seekers through both in-person and online orientations, with a focus on group sessions that have improved efficiency. He reported 458 UC Work registrations, 156 CASAS tests, and 105 eligibility determinations, noting that while not all individuals are WIOA-eligible, many are referred to partner agencies or receive services like digital literacy support. Career counseling efforts resulted in 615 Individual Employment Plans (IEPs), 199

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completed soft skills trainings, and 105 in-demand IT training completions across Program Years (PY) 2023 and 2024.

Robert Croom also reviewed training expenditures and strategy shifts. PY23 included class-size contracts, with 42 dislocated workers and 27 adults still in training, totaling projected charges of nearly \$193,000. For PY24, the team moved away from class-size contracts to trackable, individual contracts and is exploring national agreements. Currently, 66 dislocated workers and 25 adults are enrolled, with additional individuals in the pipeline awaiting new funding. He also shared that between July 2024 and June 2025, the AJC hosted job fairs and hiring events with 1,441 attendees and 298 confirmed hires, with hiring numbers expected to increase as data from the LOOP system is updated.

Lillian Roman provided an update on Union County's Program Year 2024 performance measures, which compares outcomes across local areas. She noted that while no area is meeting all benchmarks, Union County is performing well relative to others and is currently meeting or exceeding all dislocated worker performance goals. However, challenges remain in adult employment outcomes for quarters two and four, largely due to the county's high unemployment rate and the complex barriers faced by job seekers, such as inconsistent work history, transportation, language, and education gaps. Lillian Roman emphasized that the team is actively addressing these issues through enhanced follow-ups, stronger employer partnerships, and expanded support services.

Jeffrey Jackson reported that from January 1 to May 31, social workers scheduled 203 client assessment appointments, completing 113, with 90 no-shows. Of those assessed, 113 clients were referred to various programs: 44 to ESL combined with community work experience, 15 to work experience only, 32 to standalone community work experience, 9 to GED combined with CWEP, and one to a behavioral health or substance abuse program. He acknowledged Union County's 7.5% participation rate under Workforce New Jersey, ranking 13th in the state, and noted a shift in strategy from compliance-focused services to career pathway development. Jeffrey Jackson highlighted the expansion of CWEP to include county departments and the City of Elizabeth, with implementation expected within a month.

Chairman Robinson asked about the notably higher work participation rates in Hudson and Somerset counties, questioning whether anyone had insight into the strategies those counties were using, as their rates were double or nearly triple that of Union County. Rhonda McClain responded that while no specific details were available at the moment, there would be a meeting with all county administrators in July, where she planned to inquire further.

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Melissa Lespinasse provided a brief update on UCNJ, Union College of Union County services, noting that 22 Union County residents participated in information sessions, 95 received eligibility and training services, and there were 11 OJT contracts and nine students in career services and job placements. She also mentioned that 1,112 students are currently enrolled in WIOA Title II ABLE Plus grant classes as they enter the fourth quarter.

Juanito Chiluisa reported that employment services continue to support Union County residents receiving Unemployment Insurance, with the unemployment rate remaining steady between 4.2% and 4.5%. Approximately 260 UI claimants are served virtually each week, while around 112 are seen in person. Of those served, about 30–35% are referred to the American Job Center for potential WIOA training eligibility, though participation is voluntary.

Valerie Kerrigan shared that during the fourth quarter, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) deemed 166 individuals eligible, developed 157 employment plans, and helped 15 clients achieve 90+ days of employment. Since October 1, there were 430 adult referrals and 60 youth referrals, with a total of 1,121 individuals served by the end of March. She emphasized that schools can refer students year-round and encouraged stronger collaboration, expressing interest in participating in United Way's resource fair and offering DVR presentations to partner programs.

X. **Old Business**
No Comment

XI. **New Business**
Hillary McCarron shared that her team recently visited the new Global Academy of Logistics and praised Principal Jasmine Lee for her leadership and commitment to learning. They engaged with the school's 44 freshmen and are excited to see enrollment grow in the coming year. Plans are also underway to provide professional development for educators and guidance counselors. Additionally, she announced a virtual Port of New York and New Jersey tour on June 18 at 10 a.m., which includes an overview and virtual drive of the port. The event is open to all job seekers interested in transportation careers and does not require pre-registration.

XII. **Public Comments**
Julio Sabater, CEO of Workforce Advantage, expressed appreciation for being part of the initiative and thanked partners like Jeffrey Jackson, Robert Croom, and Lillian Roman for their collaboration in expanding Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) site options and improving data processes. He

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acknowledged recent progress in capturing program efforts more effectively in AOSOS. Julio Sabater also announced that Workforce Advantage received nearly \$1 million through the Pathways to Recovery grant to serve individuals impacted by the opioid crisis across Union County and the central New Jersey region. The program aims to engage over 200 clients in the next 18 months, with AOSOS data tracking required. He emphasized readiness to launch immediately and looks forward to working closely with the AJC.

Sabrina Sabater, also representing Workforce Advantage, shared her enthusiasm about implementing the grant locally. She noted that past work in the northern region had been highly impactful and credited strong partnerships as key to success.

XIII. **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Robinson at 10:40am.

Meeting Schedule:

9:00 AM, Wednesday, July 23, 2025

Location:

The Hill Tavern at Galloping Hill, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033