

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, December 10, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

Board Members Present

Stan Robinson Jr., SHR Marketing, LLC (**Chair**)
Caroline Aubrey, The Aubrey Group
Debbie Ann Anderson, Union County Department of Human Services (Melissa Lespinasse)
Erich Peter, Union County Economic Development Corp (**Vice President**)
Gwen Ryan, Union County Vocational Technical School
Dr. Margaret McMenamin, UCNJ, Union College of Union County, NJ (Dr. Lisa Hiscano)
Bernadette Griswold, Community Access Unlimited (Stephanie Jasinski)
Juanito Chiluisa, NJ Department of Labor-Employment Services
Timothy McConway, Steamfitters Local 475
Morgan Thompson, Prevention Links
Paul Belardo, KML Carpenters
James R. Brady, The Savor Group
Curry Bucu, Trinitas Regional Medical Center (Shimon Pradhan)
Antonietta LaVecchia, UPS Store
Joseph Venezia, Colliers Engineering & Design
Daryl Palmieri, Union County Schools K-12
Melynda Disla, Gateway Family YMCA (Colleen Connell)
Gloria Dunham, Qunnection Management
Danielle Johnson, JCT Solutions

Board Members Absent:

Craig Coughlin, Kean University
Richard Capac, Crowne Property Management (**Secretary**)
Courtney Villani, Villani Bus
Valerie Kerrigan, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Hilary McCarron, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
Alan Rutan, Rutan Mechanical LLC
Dr. Kamran Tasharofi, Union County Healthcare Associates
Teresa Soto-Vega, PROCEED
Roshan White, UA Local 24 Plumbers

General Counsel:

Kraig Dowd, Weber Dowd Law

County of Union:

Ed Oatman, County Manager
Sergio Granados, Union County Commissioner
Antonio Rivera, Workforce Development Board
Meredith Barracato, Workforce Development Board
Gina Tuesta, Workforce Development Board
Lisa Bonanno, Workforce Development Board

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, December 10, 2025

MEETING MINUTES

Melissa Lespinasse, Union County Department of Human Services

Lillian Roman, Union County American Job Center

Rhonda McClain, Union County Division of Social Services

Guests:

Christina Lorenzo, NJ Department of Labor

Yousena Compere, NJ Department of Labor

Anthea Williams, NJ Department of Labor

Ingrid Macias, NJ Department of Labor

Marie Alston, United Way of Greater Union County

Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County

Julio Sabater, Workforce Advantage

Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library

Patty Banks, Plainfield Public Library

Dr. Ann Marie Mc Namara, Union County Vocational Technical School

Andy Calagris, Union County Magnet High School

Douglas Gee, Union County Magnet High School

I. Call to Order & Welcome

The public meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board was called to order at 9:15 a.m. by Stan Robinson Jr., Chairman. Chairman Robinson welcomed board members, county staff, partners, and guests and asked attendees to silence electronic devices before proceeding with the agenda.

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

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, December 10, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

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.

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 October 15, 2025 meeting were presented for a vote.

**BOARD
ACTION**

James Brady made a motion to approve the meeting minutes for October 15, 2025. **Erich Peter** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

VI. UCWDB Report

Antonio Rivera, Director of the Union County Workforce Development Board, presented the Director's Report and provided an overview of budget management and policy changes affecting workforce programs.

Director Rivera explained that the Board was simultaneously managing three program years, noting that Program Year 2023 had recently closed, Program Year 2024 was midway through implementation, and Program Year 2025 had begun on July 1, 2025. He reported that approximately nine million dollars had been received across these funding periods and reviewed current expenditure levels across Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Digital Equity Training funds.

Director Rivera highlighted that Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Adult funds were approximately ninety-four percent expended, Dislocated Worker funds approximately eighty-two percent expended, and Youth funds approximately eighty-nine percent expended. He noted that Digital Equity Training funds remained available, with approximately one million dollars still to be expended, and expressed hope that the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development would approve an extension of the grant due to extensive administrative and monitoring requirements.

Director Rivera further explained that significant federal and state policy changes had affected the timing and structure of Workforce New Jersey funding, including delayed Notices of Award and a shift in budget alignment from a July-to-June cycle to an October-to-September cycle. He discussed the

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, December 10, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

impact of recent federal legislation on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families administration, including increased cost-sharing responsibilities for states and localities and new financial penalties tied to benefit error rates.

Timothy McConway asked whether the data distinguished between younger individuals entering the workforce and older individuals with prior work experience, noting that skill levels and employment readiness could vary significantly by age.

Director Rivera responded that age-based data was available through the Union County Department of Human Services and that staff could obtain and share this information with the Board.

Director Rivera emphasized that the Board's role had shifted from monitoring participation rates to focusing on employment placement and retention outcomes. He reported that Workforce New Jersey contracts now required an eighty percent job placement rate and a sixty percent retention rate, which represented a significant change in expectations for serving some of the most vulnerable populations.

Dr. Lisa Hiscano added that the populations being discussed were primarily Temporary Assistance for Needy Families participants, many of whom faced complex barriers including long-term unemployment, childcare needs, transportation challenges, housing instability, food insecurity, and mental health concerns. She noted that these factors contributed to higher dropout and stop-out rates and required significant coordination among providers, social services, and the American Job Center.

Director Rivera thanked Board members for the discussion and stated that the context provided was intended to inform the resolutions presented later in the meeting.

VII. Resolutions of the UCWDB

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

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-37

**A RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
AWARDING A CONTRACT TO WEBER DOWD LAW, LLC, FOR THE PROVISION OF
GENERAL COUNSEL SERVICES.**

**Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, December 10, 2025**

MEETING MINUTES

Meredith Barracato presented Resolution No. 2025-37, awarding a contract to Weber Dowd Law, LLC for General Counsel services. She explained that a Request for Qualifications had been issued on October 8, 2025, and that one proposal was received and reviewed by the evaluation committee. The proposal met all requirements, and Weber Dowd Law possessed over thirty years of experience working with government entities, including recent work with the Workforce Development Board on procurement, contracts, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act compliance. The contract term would begin January 1, 2026, with an hourly rate consistent with market standards.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-37**. **James Brady** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-37**. **Gloria Durham** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-38

**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
AUTHORIZING THE REGULAR MEETING DATES OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT BOARD FOR THE 2026 CALENDAR YEAR.**

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-38**. **James Brady** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-38**. **Paul Belardo** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-39

**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
EXERCISING OPTION TO EXTEND UNITED WAY OF GREATER UNION COUNTY YOUTH
CONTRACT.**

Meredith Barracato presented Resolution No. 2025-39 authorizing the extension of the United Way of Greater Union County youth services contract. She noted that United Way had exceeded performance and outcome measures and would continue to deliver all fourteen Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Youth Program Elements to in-school and out-of-school youth. Services included academic support, tutoring, work experience, leadership development, and mental health services. The contract term would run from January 1, 2026 through December 31, 2026 and would not exceed six hundred thousand dollars.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-39**. **Juanito Chiluisa** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-39**. **Paul Belardo** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-40

**Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, December 10, 2025**

MEETING MINUTES

**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
AMENDING THE PROGRAM YEAR 2025 UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT AREA BUDGET.**

Meredith Barracato presented Resolution No. 2025-40 amending the Program Year 2025 budget. She explained that, due to changes affecting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families participants, additional funding would be allocated for work-based learning and Individual Training Accounts. These investments would support job placement and credential attainment.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-40**. **Erich Peter** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-40**. **Gloria Durham** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-41

**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
AUTHORIZING THE USE OF COMPETITIVE CONTRACTING PROCEDURES FOR THE
PROCUREMENT OF WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY SERVICE PROVIDERS.**

Meredith Barracato presented Resolution No. 2025-41 authorizing the use of competitive contracting procedures for the procurement of Workforce New Jersey service providers. She explained that the forthcoming Request for Proposals would emphasize paid internships, transitional jobs, apprenticeships, on-the-job training, credential attainment, and clear pathways to unsubsidized employment, consistent with the new placement and retention mandates.

**BOARD
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-41**. **Gloria Durham** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-35**. **Erich Peter** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Lisa Hiscano abstained from **Resolution No. 2025-41**.

Director Antonio Rivera reviewed the WorkFirst New Jersey summary table and explained that the Workforce Development Board had shifted its focus away from funding participation-based work activities toward prioritizing work-based learning and training, as responsibility for participation activities now rested with county social service agencies. He stated that the Board's emphasis was now on placing individuals into employment and training opportunities, including on-the-job training, transitional jobs, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning models that provided paid, hands-on experience and helped reduce barriers to employment. Director Rivera reported that three hundred thousand dollars had been reallocated to Individual Training Accounts to expand access to training opportunities, with the American Job Center responsible for assessing participant

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, December 10, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

readiness and referring individuals either to work-based learning partners or to structured training through Individual Training Accounts. He further noted that supportive services such as transportation and childcare were critical to helping participants enter and retain employment, ultimately leading to unsubsidized jobs.

Director Rivera emphasized that this shift reflected statewide changes driven by the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. He also reported that a major challenge had been the temporary removal of Certified Nursing Assistant training from the Eligible Training Provider List, which limited training options in Union County, but announced that after several months of advocacy, the Department of Labor had approved the reinstatement of Certified Nursing Assistant training.

Amy Wagner commended Director Rivera for leading the waiver request process, securing employer letters of support, and collaborating with training providers to demonstrate the local demand for Certified Nursing Assistant and patient care technician pathways, and acknowledged the importance of these entry-level healthcare positions for residents seeking career advancement. Director Rivera concluded by noting that these efforts highlighted ongoing structural and administrative challenges, which the Board continued to address in coordination with state partners.

VIII. Union County Magnet High School Intern Reports

Andy Caligaris, a senior at Union County Magnet High School, presented an overview of his internship experience with the Union County Workforce Development Board, explaining that he joined the Board to gain exposure to a professional office environment, build professional connections, and develop a deeper understanding of the financial field in alignment with his academic interests and long-term career goals in finance and quantitative analysis. Mr. Caligaris reported that over the previous three months he had reviewed more than seventy-five vouchers submitted by workforce partners, with amounts ranging from approximately five thousand dollars to five hundred thousand dollars, serving as the initial reviewer in the Board's multi-layer voucher review process to verify payments and services and ensure proper documentation and regulatory compliance.

Mr. Caligaris described his role in helping to implement an enhanced voucher review process designed to improve efficiency and fiscal accountability, beginning with the identification of oversights that were documented in a standardized spreadsheet detailing the nature and monetary impact of each finding, thereby creating a clear paper trail and allowing staff and vendors to identify patterns and prevent recurring errors. Mr. Caligaris noted that common

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, December 10, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

deficiencies included unclear documentation related to literacy challenges and missing supporting documentation, which required correction to validate transactions and maintain compliance.

Douglas Gee, a student at Union County Magnet High School within the Union County Vocational-Technical Schools District, presented findings from his internship focused on data analysis and data visualization for the Union County Workforce Development Board. Mr. Gee summarized labor market data he analyzed over the previous several months, beginning with an overview of job posting density across Union County municipalities, which he explained as the ratio of job postings to population.

Mr. Gee noted that municipalities such as Berkeley Heights and Summit demonstrated higher job posting density, while municipalities such as Roselle Park and Roselle exhibited lower density, requiring residents to seek employment opportunities outside their communities, and emphasized the importance of expanding local job opportunities in areas with lower job availability. He also reviewed data on the twenty most common occupations in the county, noting that many high-employment occupations offered lower wages and required minimal formal education, while higher-paying occupations typically required postsecondary credentials and were less prevalent, and emphasized the importance of strengthening both high-growth industries such as healthcare and the occupations that employed the largest share of county residents.

IX. American Job Center Operator's Report

Melissa Lespinasse, representing the Union County Department of Human Services, provided the American Job Center Operator's Report. She described ongoing system changes in response to new state and federal policies, including a shift toward a case management model focused on job placement and retention. She reported increased coordination with Workforce New Jersey partners, updated standard operating procedures, and enhanced follow-up with participants.

X. American Job Center Report

Ms. Lespinasse shared performance highlights, including training completions, Workforce New Jersey participation, adult basic literacy services, employment services, and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services activity. She noted that performance metrics would be updated in future meetings to reflect the new emphasis on job retention outcomes.

XI. WIOA Youth Services Provider

Marie Alston, Director of Youth Programs at United Way of Greater Union County, presented the Youth Services Report. She described ongoing follow-up and exit

Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board
The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033
9:00AM Wednesday, December 10, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

activities, including individualized planning for postsecondary education, vocational training, and employment. She highlighted partnerships with colleges, training providers, and community organizations, as well as continued tutoring, mental health services, mentoring, and workforce readiness activities.

Ms. Alston reported enrollment updates for Simon Youth Academy, New Jersey Youth Corps, and out-of-school youth, noting progress toward high school equivalency diplomas and continued support for graduates transitioning to employment or further education.

XII. **Old Business**
No Comment

XIII. **New Business**
No Comment

XIV. **Public Comments**

Commissioner Sergio Granados offered remarks thanking the Board and staff for their dedication and impact on residents, noting the Board's growth and effectiveness in recent years.

Julio Sabater, Workforce Advantage, expressed appreciation for Director Rivera's leadership in securing approval to reinstate Certified Nursing Assistant training as an eligible program, emphasizing its importance to employers and residents in Union County.

XV. **Adjournment**

Chairman Robinson wished everyone a Happy Holiday and thanked Board members, staff, and partners for their service and dedication. Upon motion and second, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:15 a.m.

Meeting Schedule:

9:00 AM, Wednesday, January 28, 2026

Location:

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