

## UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD DISABILITIES COMMITTEE

Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, CHAIRWOMAN

MEETING: May 12, 2026 10:00AM via Google Meet

### Committee Members

1. Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, In Road to Opportunities
2. Robert Croom, American Job Center
3. Valerie Kerrigan, NJDVRS
4. Elizabeth Paskewich, Union County Dept Human Services
5. Manny Ramirez, UC ADA Compliance
6. Marc Schweitzer, DVRS
7. Amy Wagner, UC Deputy County Manager
8. Carla Donegan, Parent Advocate
9. Dr. Reinaldo Santiago Herreno, Arc of Union County

### Union County Workforce Development Staff

Meredith Barracato

Gina Tuesta

### **Meeting Summary**

Chairwoman Cyndy Walsh Rintzler called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. via Google Meet and welcomed attendees to the Union County Workforce Development Board Disabilities Committee meeting. Meredith Barracato thanked participants for attending and requested that committee members place their names and organizations in the chat box for attendance purposes. Committee members introduced themselves and provided updates regarding their organizations and services.

**Approval of October 7, 2025 and January 23, 2026 meeting minutes:** Chairwoman Cyndy Walsh Rintzler requested a motion to approve the October 7, 2025 and January 23, 2026 meeting minutes. Marc Schweitzer made a motion to approve the meeting minutes and Gina Tuesta seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously with no corrections or objections.

### **Standing Items:**

**Budget:** Meredith Barracato reported that the Program Year 2024 budget was currently being closed out and overall utilization was approximately 84 percent. She explained that vendors were being asked to submit all remaining invoices so the Workforce Development Board could complete the closeout process. Meredith noted that the Program Year 2025 budget utilization remained low because New Jersey Department of Labor regulations require Program Year 2024 funds to be fully expended before Program Year 2025 funds can be

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utilized. She added that Program Year 2025 funding would become the primary focus moving forward.

**Performance Data:** Meredith Barracato reviewed the most recent performance data updated at the end of April 2026. She explained that the Workforce Development Board was currently in Program Year 2025 Quarter 3 and was working to improve the performance areas identified in red within the adult and youth categories. Meredith stated that many participants had recently exited programs and were now entering the Employment Quarter 2 and Employment Quarter 4 performance measurement periods. She expressed optimism that the performance indicators would improve by late July once additional employment outcomes were captured.

Meredith also reviewed customer flow information for the American Job Center and Employment Services and explained that more than 3,000 individuals had been enrolled since the beginning of Program Year 2025. She stated that Employment Services typically served individuals needing one-day services such as résumé assistance or job search support, which contributed to the high enrollment figures. Meredith explained that monthly enrollment trends consistently ranged between the high 300s and 400s, with March showing one of the highest enrollment totals due in part to new Workforce New Jersey mandates requiring individuals receiving county social service benefits to participate in training programs.

Meredith discussed data related to individuals who disclosed disabilities during the intake process. She stated that only 71 individuals had disclosed disabilities since July 2025, which represented a relatively small percentage compared to the total number served. Meredith explained that many individuals disclosed having a disability without identifying the specific disability category. Among those who did identify a disability, mobility and physical disabilities were the most frequently reported, followed by mental health conditions and chronic health conditions. Meredith emphasized the importance of improving engagement strategies and asking more probing questions during intake and follow-up meetings to better identify barriers to participation and provide appropriate supportive services.

**Unemployment Data:** Meredith Barracato reviewed current unemployment data for Union County and reported that unemployment rates had fluctuated throughout Program Year 2025 due in part to manufacturing and retail closures throughout the county. She explained that unemployment had reached as high as 6.2 percent but had recently declined and was now more closely aligned with the statewide unemployment rate of approximately 4.2 percent.

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**Labor Market Information:** Meredith Barracato reviewed labor market information provided through New Jersey Department of Labor Lightcast reports. She explained that healthcare, commercial driver's license occupations, information technology, and retail remained among the county's highest demand industries.

Meredith focused specifically on retail occupations and discussed inclusive design practices and universal accessibility concepts that could improve retail and public spaces for all individuals, including those with disabilities. She shared information from a recent Access Coalition meeting, where organizations discussed how small modifications within businesses could improve accessibility and usability for everyone. Meredith explained that businesses should focus on dignity, belonging, and usability rather than simply meeting minimum Americans with Disabilities Act compliance standards.

**SETC Disability Assessment Checklist:** Meredith Barracato reviewed the State Employment and Training Commission One-Stop Certification process and discussed the new Disability Assessment Checklist requirements. She explained that the checklist evaluates accessibility, customer service delivery, staff knowledge regarding disabilities, accommodations, assistive technology, communication methods, transportation accessibility, and overall customer experience.

Meredith emphasized that the purpose of the assessment was not simply to check boxes for compliance but to improve the customer-centered experience throughout the workforce system. She stated that the Workforce Development Board would work collaboratively with the American Job Center operator and network partners to identify areas needing improvement and implement strategies focused on removing barriers and increasing accessibility.

Chairwoman Cyndy Walsh Rintzler supported the idea of implementing regular trainings and suggested conducting a survey to identify priority training topics for staff and partners. She discussed potential training topics including assistive technology, working with individuals with behavioral challenges, calming techniques, and creating supportive routines and structures. Meredith stated that a follow-up email would be sent to committee members that included a survey and opportunities for participants to recommend additional training topics.

**DVRS Resources:** Valerie Kerrigan provided an overview of resources available through the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. She discussed disability etiquette training opportunities, interpreter services, assistive technology resources,

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and accessibility supports for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired.

Valerie discussed the UbiDuo communication device, which allows individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or unable to verbally communicate through spoken language to communicate through typed text. She recommended that workforce locations consider purchasing such devices for customer-facing areas.

Valerie emphasized the importance of workforce partners understanding available resources through both the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. She also stressed the importance of communication and collaboration among workforce partners to ensure shared customers receive coordinated services and successful outcomes.

**Committee Comments/Updates:** Robert Croom announced that the Plainfield American Job Center office was temporarily closed and informed the committee that services were currently being provided from the Elizabeth office located at 342 Westminster Avenue in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Carla Reifsteck Donegan provided an update regarding upcoming financial aid changes associated with the new state fiscal year beginning July 1, 2026. She also discussed the federal Workforce Pell Grant initiative, which would provide Pell Grant funding opportunities for short-term training programs and certifications.

Robert Croom shared that the American Job Center Operator Committee had previously implemented partner presentations to improve understanding of available services and stated that the committee planned to reintroduce those presentations to strengthen collaboration and improve coordination among network partners.

**Meeting Schedule:** Chairwoman Cyndy Walsh Rintzler announced that the next Disabilities Committee meetings would be held on August 25, 2026 and November 10, 2026.

**Committee Adjournment:** Chairwoman Cyndy Walsh Rintzler thanked everyone for attending and participating in the meeting. She expressed appreciation to Valerie Kerrigan for presenting disability resources and encouraged committee members to continue sharing ideas to improve accessibility and services throughout the workforce system. The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:50 a.m.