

**Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board  
Special Populations Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
November 6, 2025, via Zoom at 1:00 p.m.**

<b>Members Attending</b>	<b>Members Absent</b>	<b>Staff &amp; Guests Attending</b>
Corey Johns	Nathan Garrett	Marla Rye
Freda Herndon	Jordan Osborne	Andrea Dillard
George "Bo" Callis		Ginger Fussell
Mary Lear		Kim Rye
Kristi Spurgeon		
Brandon Phinx		

The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Special Populations Committee met via Zoom on November 6, 2025 at 1:00 p.m. With a quorum confirmed, Freda Herndon called the meeting to order. Bo Callis moved to approve the minutes, and Mary Lear seconded. With no further discussion, the minutes were unanimously approved.

**CSP Performance**

Andrea Dillard reviewed the first-quarter performance following Workforce Essentials' transition to Career Services Provider, effective July 1. She reported strong performance given the scope of the transition, emphasizing that staffing levels had recently reached approximately 90% capacity, positioning the team for continued improvement in upcoming quarters. Enrollment data showed the program largely on track, with a minor shortfall of five in-school youth participants, which staff anticipates addressing without difficulty. A larger gap was noted in dislocated worker enrollments, with approximately 36 fewer participants than needed.

Andrea explained that dislocated worker eligibility is strictly defined and dependent on job loss circumstances, which severely limits who is eligible. She noted that lower numbers of dislocated workers can also reflect positive labor market conditions. She further explained that adult and dislocated worker funds are interchangeable, and the shortfall in dislocated worker enrollments was offset by exceeding adult enrollment goals by a similar margin, ensuring funds continue to be fully utilized. Marla added that goals are often combined due to the financial flexibility between the two funding streams. She reported that, while dislocation activity since January 1 has exceeded levels seen in prior years (excluding COVID), many affected individuals either need immediate reemployment or are opting for retirement rather than enrolling in

workforce programs. She also reported receipt of two WARN notices, one in Nashville and one in La Vergne, which may contribute to future dislocated worker enrollments. Andrea added that in some larger layoffs, similar companies will absorb a majority of affected workers, further limiting the need for enrollment in dislocated worker services. She concluded by expressing cautious optimism about future enrollment trends while acknowledging the positive implications of reduced demand for dislocated worker services.

### **Target Populations**

Marla provided an update on the Rural Health Care grant serving Cheatham, Robertson, Dickson, Sumner, and Wilson counties, which focuses on upskilling advanced EMTs to paramedics. Participants are currently in their second semester at Nashville State Community College and are balancing full-time employment with the program's academic demands. Two participants exited due to health-related issues, but the remaining students are progressing well, and the grant continues to move forward. Marla also shared that a new round of health care funding is anticipated in January, presenting opportunities to expand current programming. She noted ongoing coordination with Williamson Health and Nashville State, both recipients of Rural Health Care funding, including the expansion of CNA training into Humphreys County.

Marla then described the Criminal Justice Reentry Grant (CRRG), explaining that an earlier state-issued RFP had been canceled after organizational restructuring, despite strong interest from regional providers. When the funding was later reissued exclusively to local workforce boards, the board applied and was awarded funding. One project will operate in Humphreys County in partnership with the Tennessee College of Applied Technology, focusing on flooring training in carpet, tile, hardwood, and vinyl, with employer interest from Humphreys and Houston counties. Training is expected to begin in January and will likely be hosted at the Nashville State Higher Education Campus in Humphreys County, with participants also recruited from Houston County. The second CRRG project was awarded in Rutherford County, totaling approximately \$237K. This initiative will partner with TCAT Murfreesboro to deliver Certified Production Technician training, combined with work-based learning, to justice-involved individuals who have recently been released or are within 90 days of release. Nissan has committed to participating, including developing a pre-employment or pre-apprenticeship training model at its Smyrna campus.

Andrea Dillard provided an update on youth programming, beginning with the Tennessee Youth Employment Program (TYEP). The primary grant serving youth ages 14–24 began 7/1/25 and runs through 6/30/26. Effective 10/1, the board received an additional TYEP award of slightly more than \$100K to serve 32 youth with documented disabilities. This funding is administered in partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation and will support paid work experiences, including referrals from VR, school systems, and community partners.

Andrea also provided an update on the PROWD reentry grant, a federally funded initiative focused on individuals formerly incarcerated in the federal prison system. Tennessee received the four-year grant approximately two years ago, with initial implementation in Memphis. Due

to low enrollment, the program expanded in May and June to include Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville, with NM designated as the Nashville-area provider. The two-year allocation totals approximately \$950K to serve 60 individuals. Enrollment has been gradual, with 16 participants currently enrolled and six pending. Andrea highlighted the program's first successful outcome, noting that a participant completed CDL training and began employment with UPS in Nashville at \$23 per hour.

Marla returned to the VR youth initiative and asked committee members to help identify community-based organizations or schools that serve youth with disabilities. She noted that a recent meeting identified an Edison School in Sumner County as a potential partner and emphasized that the program can also help build capacity within partner organizations by funding paid work experiences that support administrative and operational needs. Andrea shared an example of current VR youth placements at Springfield High School, where collaboration with special education teacher Jessica Fry has resulted in six youth being enrolled and employed within the school system. Participants are completing cafeteria and custodial duties under school supervision, providing meaningful work experiences for youth with significant disabilities.

Andrea then reviewed updates related to incumbent worker training and apprenticeship. She reported that the board previously allocated \$300K for incumbent worker training. To date, contracts have been issued to 12 employers totaling just over \$216K, serving more than 180 individuals. New contracts issued included AO Smith and Lochinvar. She also reported receiving approximately \$180K in state apprenticeship funding from the Office of Apprenticeship. Funds are fully obligated, and staff are encouraging employers to submit invoices promptly to reach the 60% expenditure threshold required to apply for additional state incentive funds.

Marla asked Brandon Phinx about potential additional CBG funding discussed at the Governor's Conference. Brandon confirmed that additional resources are anticipated, including funding tied to micro-credentials and industry-focused strategies in areas such as advanced manufacturing and health care. However, details are still being developed at the state level. She concluded by noting that the state is also pursuing a federal Industry-Driven Skills Training Grant through the U.S. Department of Labor. Tennessee has advanced past the initial phase and is currently developing its statement of work and implementation plan. If approved, the grant would provide significant additional training resources. She emphasized that the combination of potential state and federal funding could substantially enhance services to business and industry over the next 6–12 months.

### **AJC Operational Guidance**

Andrea Dillard introduced a proposed American Job Center (AJC) operational guidance document for committee and board awareness, clarifying that it was intended as guidance aligned with the state's One Stop system design policy rather than a formal policy change. Andrea reviewed the Northern Middle area's footprint of 13 counties and 14 service locations, including a staff presence at Fort Campbell. She summarized the region's four comprehensive centers, noting that comprehensive sites include Title I and Title III services along with multiple

additional partners, and contrasted those with affiliate sites, which require Title I presence and may include other partners but do not require a state partner in the same way comprehensive centers do. Andrea also reviewed specialized centers, noting that specialized locations are not required to house both Title I and Title III. She referenced Trousdale as a specialized site because of its prison and intent to target services for individuals transitioning from incarceration, and Fort Campbell as a specialized site because of its focus on serving transitioning service members. Andrea stated that standard operating hours across locations are Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., consistent with state operations, and noted two offices are currently operating on a part-time basis. She explained that, due to reduced staffing compared to prior providers, and because of budget limitations, two locations are open three days per week and closed two days per week. On days when those offices are closed, staff assigned to those sites are reassigned to larger offices to support higher caseloads. Marla added that some AJCs that host adult education classes remain open in the evenings. Freda Herndon noted that adult education typically operates until 8:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday, clarifying that evening access is limited to adult education participants rather than to general job-seeker services.

Marla transitioned to a state-level update following the Governor's Conference for Economic Development, held in Murfreesboro, and invited Brandon Phinx and Corey Johns to share observations on a new initiative, Tennessee Works. Brandon described Tennessee Works as a coordinated "one-stop" approach for employers, designed to bundle resources from multiple state agencies into a unified package or proposal, reducing employer fatigue and streamlining access to workforce, education, and economic development supports. Corey added that the initiative appears intended to better align resources during the employer recruitment process, including strategies to address skills gaps more efficiently by integrating training and credential solutions earlier rather than after the fact. Brandon affirmed Corey's interpretation and reiterated that the goal is improved coordination across agencies and more efficient employer engagement.

Corey asked a follow-up question about the AO Smith and Lochinvar training referenced earlier, and Andrea clarified that the contracts were issued under the incumbent worker training program. Corey noted the outcome aligned with employer engagement efforts from a prior meeting and expressed appreciation. Marla discussed the possibility of arranging a check presentation and photo opportunity to highlight the investment, including potential participation from local leadership.

Marla tied the Tennessee Works discussion back to the AJC strategy and recent facility developments. She referenced the recent meeting held in Nashville at the Nashville State Community College joint campus location and the grand opening of the facility, noting it as an example of the direction future bricks-and-mortar workforce delivery may take. Marla stated that alignment of workforce and education partners in shared spaces supports holistic service delivery and reflects the broader state direction. She shared that discussions are underway with Nashville State regarding potential co-location at the Humphreys County Higher Education

Center. She referenced the opportunity to connect that co-location with the previously discussed reentry flooring training partnership involving TCAT Dickson.

Marla then provided an update on the federal government shutdown, stating there has been no operational impact on local AJCs. She explained that WIOA is forward-funded, with funding authority already in place for 7/1/25 through 6/30/26, allowing continued operations and the drawdown of funds statewide. However, labor market information reporting, including monthly unemployment-related reporting, would pause until the shutdown ends due to furloughs affecting that team. Corey commented that the lack of updated unemployment figures complicates messaging.

Marla also noted participation in a resource fair in Montgomery County for impacted soldiers, family members, and contractors. She described coordination with counterparts in Kentucky to support a similar effort for Kentucky residents earlier in the week. Marla shared that unemployment insurance may be available for individuals affected by furloughs or job loss, but highlighted concerns that if Congress authorizes back pay once the shutdown ends, recipients could be required to repay unemployment insurance, creating hesitation among affected workers. Freda asked for an update on RESA. Marla stated she was not fully certain about the latest status but indicated that, based on recent communication with Valeria Duke in Rutherford County, the program remains operational.

### **Adjourn**

Marla reminded members of the upcoming meeting scheduled for the following Wednesday in Franklin.