Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board Inc.

**Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board**
**Special Populations Committee**
**Meeting Minutes**
**August 4, 2026, via Zoom at 11:00 a.m.**

**APPROVED**
**NOV. 4, 2026**

| Members Attending | Members Absent | Staff & Guests Attending |
|---|---|---|
| Corey Johns | Jordan Osborne | Marla Rye |
| Freda Herndon | | Andrea Dillard |
| Nathan Garrett | | Meagan Dobbins |
| Bo Callis | | Ginger Fussell |
| Mary Lear | | Alyssa Spaulding |
| Kristi Spurgeon | | |
| Nestor Reyes | | |
| | | |

The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board Special Populations Committee met via Zoom on August 4, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. With a quorum confirmed, Freda Herndon called the meeting to order. Before regular business, Freda invited Nathan Garrett to share an update on the Springfield TCAT project. Nathan reported that a site had been identified and the land purchase was in process, although no agreements had been signed. Freda recognized that the progress followed a lengthy site search. Mary Lear moved to approve the previous meeting's minutes, and Nathan Garrett seconded. With no further discussion, the minutes passed unanimously, and Freda moved to business reports.

**WIOA Report**

Andrea Dillard reported that preliminary Q4 federal performance results met or exceeded all measures, with finalization expected in September. She credited Meagan Dobbins for anticipating the year-end improvement. After negotiations with the state for the next two years, six performance standards increased, six decreased, and three remained unchanged. Andrea said Marla's counterproposals resulted in more favorable targets than initially proposed. Meagan reviewed year-end CSP performance. Staff enrolled 1,079 participants against the state's combined Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth goal of 1,108, reaching 97%. The separate program goals were established internally for CSP management. Staff completed 991 case closures, nearly matching enrollments, and placement wages exceeded goals. Meagan attributed the stronger fourth quarter to strategies implemented after a cautious start during the transition to in-house services and reduced funding. Marla said the final two quarters better reflected the operation's capacity and provided a stronger foundation for the new year.

Andrea updated the committee on AJC changes in Cheatham, Houston, Humphreys, Robertson, Stewart, Trousdale, Wilson, and Williamson counties. Services continued in all eight counties. Workforce Essentials-owned buildings in Cheatham, Robertson, and Williamson remained open as Workforce Essentials offices rather than AJCs, with overhead no longer supported by WIOA funds. Humphreys County services moved to Nashville State Community College. Houston County provided space in the 911 building in partnership with TCAT Dickson, which planned to begin an LPN class there in September. Stewart County services used the senior citizens building, Trousdale County provided courthouse space, and TCAT provided space in Wilson County for scheduled customer meetings. Andrea emphasized that the delivery structure had changed while local access to services continued.

**Employer Grants**

Andrea reported that $300K was available for incumbent worker training in the new program year. Three contracts totaling slightly more than $36K had been obligated, with additional employer applications expected within the next week or so.

Andrea reviewed federal State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula funding received in February and available through June 2027. The $54K in SAEF 3.1 program funds was fully obligated, with invoices of approximately $20K and $26.5K awaiting approval for payment. Under SAEF 3.2, $65K of the $135K available had been contracted. Andrea noted that these funds were limited to apprenticeships in specified high-demand occupations and sectors, unlike the broader state apprenticeship funding used previously.

**New Grant Opportunities**

Marla reported that a new Rural Healthcare grant would continue training advanced EMTs to become paramedics. Following discussions with county mayors and local communities, staff renewed the Volunteer State partnership serving participants from Wilson, Robertson, Cheatham, and Dickson counties and expanded the initiative to Austin Peay State University. Austin Peay's new paramedic program would improve access for Montgomery, Stewart, and Houston counties. Marla reported an approximately 83% certification rate in the prior cohort, with some withdrawals due to personal circumstances.

Andrea reported that the Youth Employment Program enrolled 302 young people ages 14 to 24 against a goal of 272. Partnerships included CTE programs in Cheatham, Montgomery, Humphreys, and Rutherford counties, patient care training with a nursing home and hospital in Humphreys County, and early teacher training in Stewart County. Meagan worked with the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System to support paid work experience for high school seniors in its new CDL program. TCAT dental assisting students also received wages during required internships. She reported that vocational rehabilitation youth funding served 28 participants against a goal of 32. Funding arrived after the program year began, and some participants' disabilities limited their weekly work hours, contributing to unused funds. Successful partnerships included Project SEARCH hospital rotations in Montgomery County and internships for students with developmental disabilities through Lipscomb and Vanderbilt programs. Andrea said approximately $675K in new youth employment funding had been received. Since July 1, nearly 40 participants had enrolled for direct wage payments, while employers had hired an additional 109 young people whose documentation was pending for entry into the system and employer reimbursement.

**USDOL Waivers and AJC Future**

Marla reviewed Tennessee's 13 federal WIOA waiver requests and the U.S. Department of Labor's July 27 response. She highlighted flexibility in the requirement to spend 75% of Youth funds on out-of-school youth, supportive services for Adult and Dislocated Worker participants after exit, and employer-requested career readiness assessments without individual WIOA eligibility determinations. Some requests were approved, while others involved flexibility already available under existing law. Marla reported that requests to allow state selection of a statewide One-Stop Operator and exclude SNAP participants from local performance measures were denied. The waiver allowing regional planning councils to perform local workforce board functions was approved. Marla explained that the proposed Workforce System Governance Framework would be presented to the State Workforce Development Board August 28, following public comment through August 14. If approved, the policy listed a September 1, 2026, effective date. It would establish regional workforce boards for East, Middle, and West Tennessee, with regional boards assuming the statutory responsibilities of local workforce boards. Northern Middle would remain a local workforce area but would be governed by a Middle Tennessee regional board serving Northern Middle, Southern Middle, and Upper Cumberland across 40 counties.

Local elected officials would retain financial accountability, execute interlocal agreements, select local CLEOs, and appoint regional board members. The three CLEOs would form a regional council responsible for selecting a fiscal agent. The regional board would select a lead administrative organization. The state recommended using the same organization for administration and fiscal services to reduce duplication and strengthen accountability, although separate organizations could serve those roles. Local advisory councils would provide input to the regional board, potentially using existing employer or education advisory groups.

Marla said she had been advised that local operations would remain in place until July 1, 2027, despite the policy's earlier effective date. She had also been told the state wanted one service provider and one One-Stop Operator per region. Selecting a provider capable of serving 40 counties would require substantial preparation. Marla noted that the upcoming governor transition could affect the proposal's direction and emphasized that implementation remained uncertain.

Marla welcomed Nestor Reyes, who joined the Northern Middle board July 1 and had previously partnered with the area through the Sumner County AJC. Nestor recognized the team's efforts to maintain services, encouraged collaboration through the development process, and offered continued support.

In response to Freda's question about regional board recruitment and selection, Marla expected a prescribed membership structure drawing from existing local boards. She had heard discussion of dedicated rural representation but said implementation procedures would be needed to clarify the details. Freda asked whether federal approval allowed Tennessee to choose whether to implement the change. Marla confirmed that the state requested the waiver and would determine implementation through the state board's policy process. She said she would distribute the policy and public comment link after the day's committee meetings. Nathan asked whether the committee would continue meeting through the transition. Marla expected existing local boards and committees to remain active through June 30, 2027. She anticipated that procurement for a regional service provider would need to begin in January for a July 1 start. Nathan also asked how staff were managing the uncertainty. Marla said unresolved questions about state board approval, leadership changes, and regional administration created uncertainty. Nathan expressed appreciation for the team's work through recent changes. Corey Johns asked whether requests denied by the federal government were separate from those that did not require a waiver. Marla confirmed the distinction, explaining that the statewide One-Stop Operator and SNAP performance requests were denied because the federal agency could not waive those requirements. Corey expressed hope that regional alignment would improve flexibility, reduce overhead, strengthen resources, and support more effective coordination among the state, regional leadership, and local communities amid a tight labor market and continued employer recruitment.

Marla agreed that staff should identify opportunities to improve the system but questioned the administrative efficiencies from retaining three local areas within the Middle Tennessee region. The regional organization would still need three local plans and a regional plan. She believed formally designating three workforce areas aligned with the grand divisions could have simplified administration. Marla also noted Northern Middle's strong position, reporting that it was the only area meeting all federal performance measures on the latest official state report card and the only board rated at an efficient and effective level in the UT Center for Industrial Services evaluation.

Marla reminded members that the August 12 board meeting would be held at Scarritt Bennett Center in Nashville, with Commissioner Deniece Thomas scheduled to speak. Freda asked whether the Commissioner might address broader alignment among education, economic development, and workforce services. Marla said that discussion could occur through the TNWORKS initiative. Nestor invited members to attend the August 28 State Workforce Development Board meeting in Nashville for additional information, and Freda encouraged members to listen.

### Adjourn

With no further questions, Bo Callis moved to adjourn, which was made, and Mary Lear seconded, and Freda concluded the meeting.