

Kevin Coughlin, Chair Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board
Vice President of Saints Medical Center
Remarks/Comments
Merrimack College
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Good Morning Secretary Oates and Congressman Tierney

My name is Kevin Coughlin, Vice President of Saints Medical Center in Lowell and Chairman of the Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board. I take this opportunity to thank you both for providing me the opportunity to speak with you concerning the work of the Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board and upcoming WIA Reauthorization.

We are pleased to have a strong advocate of the workforce development system in Congressman John Tierney who is a senior member of the Committee and on Education, Labor and thank him for inviting Undersecretary Oates to the Merrimack Valley today.

I am here today not only as a representative of the workforce development system, but also as Vice President of one of the largest employers in Greater Lowell. Saints Medical Center is a full service acute care community hospital providing residents of Greater Lowell with quality care since 1839 with 1,400 employees providing quality care. The facilities include Cancer Care, Cardiovascular Medicine, Orthopedic Center and the Women's Health Care Center. I became involved with the GLWIB due to the hospital's continued need for quality and skilled employees in our area.

Health Care continues to be the fastest growing industry in the Greater Lowell WIA area. With continued demographic changes in the area, especially within the City of Lowell, Saints must be progressive in the care of our immigrant community with the emphasis on the Southeast Asian and Hispanic community.

Currently Saints is involved in several sectoral healthcare initiatives within the workforce development system. We are a partner in a WIA funded project entitled PATH (Pathways to Advancement and Training in Health Care). PATH provides career ladder training for entry-level workers in patient care and medical administration career track. The hospital applied for and received a Workforce Training Grant that provides education leading to a Registered Nurse degree for several of our Licensed Practical Nurses. Our partner, Rivier College provides course training on site and participating staff are paid for time spent in training. Saints Medical Center continually utilizes the resources of the Career Center of Lowell for recruitment purposes. All of the programs assist the hospital with continual staff development resulting in excellent quality care.

The Greater Lowell WIB is one of 16 boards in Massachusetts. The population of the WIA area is approximately 276,000 people with a labor force of 145,000. Our area, along with the remainder of the Commonwealth and country has seen a dramatic increase in unemployed persons from 5.3% in June of 2008 to 9.5% in June of 2009. The City of Lowell's current rate is 11.7%. As Chair of the Board I am acutely aware of the needs of all workforce development customers both employers and job seeker customers.

The Board commends the vision of the WIA and One Stop system that created a highly responsive organizational system working to meet the challenges of our local labor market whether in a period of labor surplus or shortage. The Greater Lowell WIB oversees the charter of the Career Center of Lowell a collaborative center employing both City of Lowell and Commonwealth of Massachusetts state employees.

Our center is one of the first true collaboratives in the state and we are proud of the accomplishments of the dedicated staff both city and state providing high quality core and intensive services for our employer and job seeker customers.

The board works closely with the City of Lowell, the WIA grant recipient as well as our partnering towns. The Greater Lowell WIB is a working board with several subcommittees represented by business, labor education, economic development and WIA partners. All committee progress and projects center around the GLWIB Strategic Plan and the three primary goals of the board that are:

- Promote a highly skilled and educated workforce capable of earning a sustaining wage, and to ensure access for all individuals and families in the region providing opportunities for ongoing employment and career development.
- Meet the workforce needs of current and future employers, thereby supporting economic development, business competitiveness and job growth in Greater Lowell.
- Enhance the organizational effectiveness of the Greater Lowell WIB to provide leadership in the region, engage key stakeholders and maximize the use of resources to establish and sustain an effective workforce development system.

I believe the Lowell board works well due to several reasons. We are the policy thinkers, driving workforce programs needed for the future. All members bring a local perspective to workforce issues affecting the local community.

We work well with other Workforce Boards in bringing quality programs in sectoral industries such as the Health Care Learning Network and the Merrimack Valley Regional Innovation Grant for local manufacturers.

Sectoral programs that cross WIB and state borders create best practices due to local knowledge and collaboration. Our board looks forward to continued programs with our WIB partners in Massachusetts.

With the importance of upcoming WIA Reauthorization, the board would request Congress and the Department of Labor to consider and support the following during WIA Reauthorization hearings;

- Maintain the locally private sector driven workforce board model that strengthens effective partnerships among business, educators, labor and community based organizations.
- Continue to allow the locally WIB approved one stop system of integrating both merit based state staffing as well as WIA staffing as is the case in our collaborative center in Lowell.
- Allow a stand-alone summer employment program for youth.
- Consider the expansion of youth eligibility allowing for more youth to participate in WIA funded programs.
- Allow for flexibility in training allocations to include individual training accounts, customized training, group training, on the job training, incumbent worker training and sector based training.
- Consider streamlining performance measures to common measures for all programs with uniform reporting and wage record matching.
- Consider changes to formula funding that can be predicted in real time economics.

In closing I thank you both for your dedication to workforce development in the Commonwealth and the country. The GLWIB looks forward to working with the Department of Labor and Congress on this very important subject.