

Woodcock viewed the conditionally approved local plan as the crucial instrument needed to give the area a right to its funding, writing that he saw no need for the local agency to have annual contracts with the state.

“The relationship of Coastal Counties Workforce, Inc., to the state of Maine is that of a subrecipient, not a contractor. There is no procurement relationship. CCWI determines which service providers are eligible to receive the federal funds. CCWI has its performance measured in terms of the objectives laid out in the WIOA state and local plans. It has responsibility for programmatic decision making and carries out the program for a public purpose. CCWI does not provide goods or services to the state in exchange for consideration,” Woodcock wrote.

In further trying to convince the judge that the local agency had no right to its WIOA funding, Maine DOL asserted that job seekers, not the local agency, are meant to be the ultimate beneficiaries of workforce program funding.

The judge grappled with this reasoning, but ultimately decided that a clause in the general provisions of WIOA makes it fail.

WIOA Sect. 194 (12) states that, “Nothing in this subchapter shall be construed to provide an individual with an entitlement to a service under this subchapter.”

In court, Bourret testified that about a third of the agency’s budget is spent on staff, a third on other infrastructure and a third on training. Coastal Counties contracts out its career center services through a local Goodwill.

State officials argued that this administrative structure is inefficient because too much WIOA funding goes to overhead.

Judge: Law is Clear

Woodcock discussed these concerns in his ruling but declined to weigh in on them, satisfied that WIOA is clear on a state’s responsibility to release funding to local areas.

“The Court does not perceive either CCWI or the state officials as occupying a higher moral ground in this case. CCWI, in particular, occasionally allowed a degree of rhetorical smugness to creep into its argument, painting itself as championing the best interests of its customers against the unreasoned objections of state government. To be clear, the court is agnostic as to whether the current WIOA model is a better approach or whether a more flexible, centralized model would result in more money being spent for people in need of training,” Woodcock wrote.

While the judge ruled in favor of the local board, he initially held off on ordering the release of funding and instead asked the state and local area to try to negotiate how this would work. The judge cited the complexity that comes with WIOA allotments hav-

ing different base and advance portions that are released at different points in July and October.

A week later, the judge ordered the state to release the local area’s PY 2017 funding in its entirety with no spending requirement on training.

LePage immediately asked the judge to hold off on the order and appealed to the First Circuit Court of Appeals.

✓ Coastal Counties Workforce, Inc., v. Paul R. LePage is case number 1:17-cv-00417 in the United States District Court for the District of Maine.

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Local Workforce Areas

CHARLOTTE AGENCY ADJUSTS TO SERVE THOSE LEFT OUT

In a time of economic growth and urban development, Charlotte Works, the workforce agency serving Mecklenburg County, N.C., is implementing several new strategies to better reach area residents who have been left out of the city’s job gains in recent years.

Agency officials unveiled their #Careers4All campaign in November. Part of this is about communicating a message that the agency and its partners are there to help the unemployed, underemployed and those sitting out of the labor market prepare for jobs that will raise their income levels.

Beyond the hashtag, the agency is also trying out new service delivery strategies meant to better reach and serve more disadvantaged jobseekers.

“We really needed to look at this as something more systematic and we really need it to be something that is effective and inclusive,” agency Chief Executive Patrick Graham told ETR.

The Charlotte metropolitan area’s unemployment rate, in November, was 4.2 percent. Payroll job counts in the region had increased by more than 20,000, or 1.7 percent, over the year. According to American Community Survey single-year estimates for 2016, Mecklenburg County had a 12.1 percent poverty rate, 3.1 percentage points lower than all of North Carolina.

However, there are zip codes within the local workforce area where unemployment is in the double digits and the poverty rate exceeds 30 percent.

According to Graham, over time it became apparent that people accessing the agency’s two comprehensive career centers were coming from further and further away. Gentrification had been pushing jobseekers out of the city, past employment centers, transportation lines and other community institutions that traditionally met their needs.

The agency researched changes in multiple indicators of household economic health, comparing current data at the zip code level to 2000, another period of local economic growth, to find that pockets of

poverty and joblessness really had shifted and that economic inequality in the region had grown.

The operational elements of the #Careers4All initiative aim to better reach jobseekers in what agency officials describe as “unemployment clusters.”

The agency is looking for new partners in these targeted areas, such as churches, community centers and even employers, to host “outreach career advisers” employed by the agency to deliver workforce agency services.

The plan is for at least six existing frontline staffers from the workforce agency and as many as four new staffers to work in this capacity.

Charlotte Works is also implementing a centralized job coordination and placement initiative targeting different populations with barriers to employment.

Centralized Placement

This will bring together job developers from 12 workforce system partners to work together as a collocated unit for 15 to 20 hours per week. During the rest of the week, they will return to their agencies.

Members of this team will have full-time access to a cross-agency database of job leads.

Working together, they will serve a collective population from their own programs that includes ex-offenders, people with disabilities, single mothers, non-custodial parents with child support obligations and more types of jobseekers with specific barriers to employment.

The team’s collaborative placement efforts will be dedicated to larger staffing projects that come to the agency.

Charlotte Works is hiring a job coordination director to manage this unit when it is together.

One of the centralized job coordination and placement unit’s objectives will be to encourage employers to recognize jobseekers from these populations as a potential talent pool, Graham said, explaining that while about 30 percent of Charlotte Works jobseekers have a high school diploma or less, about as many have a bachelor’s degree and most others fall somewhere in between in educational attainment.

The agency has more general plans to increase investments in education and training scholarships, training that provides advancement opportunities for entry-level incumbent workers and preapprenticeship and apprenticeship training programs.

According to Graham, a focus is being put on helping people gain credentials that document skills for in-demand occupations. Credential stackability, particularly for investment in incumbent worker training, is also encouraged. While apprenticeships have the obvious benefit of tying training to employment, the agency is looking at preapprenticeship investments as a means of making apprenticeship op-

portunities accessible to disadvantage jobseekers who may need skill remediation and other assistance.

It is a different-doors-are-open approach to building opportunity.

The agency is also spreading a message that it is expanding access to training scholarships to individuals in middle-income households.

This is an attempt to shift public perception about who can benefit from training assistance. According to the Charlotte Works chief executive, traditionally most customers accessing training have had household incomes of about 70 percent of the poverty level or less. The agency would like to attract more customers with income levels ranging as high as 200 to 250 percent of the poverty line.

This would include more workers with moderate incomes who need to advance to better jobs because they are struggling with high housing costs, or people who would become second earners in their families if they can find jobs that pay enough to offset costs such as child care.

“At the end of the day, we want people to come to us if they need a job and we can find a way to satisfy a labor market demand,” Graham said.

About \$4.2 million within the agency’s budget has been set aside for the #Careers4All campaign and its investments in training. This primarily comes from the agency’s WIOA adult funds with some funds set aside from its youth program and some coming from foundations and corporate philanthropies.

In program year 2016, Charlotte Works placed more than 7,000 people in jobs. Under #Careers4All, the agency has a goal to raise placements by an additional 1,000 this year.

About 270 participants received training scholarships last year. Graham said he would like for that number to surpass 400.

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Work Requirements

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION OUTLINES MEDICAID WORK DEMONSTRATIONS

States that seek to implement work requirements in their Medicaid programs through demonstration projects should align these policies with those of their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs, federal guidance suggested. An official from the first state to do so welcomed Medicaid recipients to one-stop career centers.

On Jan. 11, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced that states will be allowed to implement “community engagement” requirements for certain Medicaid beneficiaries, under demonstration authority granted by the Social Security Act.