

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY THE POVERTY INSTITUTE

Modification to the Two-Year DLT Workforce Development State Plan In Compliance with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

June 15, 2009

The Poverty Institute has two key suggestions regarding the proposed Modification to the Two-Year State Plan. First, the plan should provide an overview of how ARRA funds are being used. A chart outlining the amount of ARRA funds for each of the WIA services and how those funds are being distributed to the local Workforce Investment Boards or available for set-aside should be included.

Second, the plan should more clearly describe new opportunities for training, especially for lower-skilled and low-income workers. The Recovery Act emphasizes that the new funds should be spent on services and training and the U. S. Department of Labor has noted that “The One Stop system’s success in implementing the Recovery Act will be gauged in part by the progress it achieves in using annual appropriations along with Recovery Act funds... to help low-skill or low-income workers acquire 21st century skills, find family-supporting jobs in healthy industries and access the middle class...” (TEGL 14-08, p.4). As described more specifically below, the plan should build on many of the innovative strategies that Rhode Island has already put in place to improve the employability of low-skilled and low-income workers.

We also commend the Department of Labor and Training for its intention to align the ARRA activities with the Governor’s Workforce Board’s Strategic Plan with the goal of transforming the state’s workforce development system, including the integration of adult education with workforce development.

The following are our suggestions for amendments to the plan regarding training:

1. p. 26: Strategies include customized training and OJT and also industry partnership/career pathways. However, it appears that within the context of the industry partnership/career pathways, the training would be provided through Individual Training Accounts. The plan should be amended to encourage the industry partnerships to consider the need for new types of group training especially to encourage the engagement of lower-skilled Rhode Islanders. The plan should encourage, for example, expanding the Newport Skills Alliance model of providing group training to obtain the basic

skills necessary to then enter a content-area training (e.g., CNA) or directly into employment.

In addition, this section should articulate a priority for the local workforce boards' plans to include the development of training in conjunction with the community college and with local training providers in the area of green jobs and health care.

2. p. 28: Rhode Island has indeed made strides in increasing training opportunities for workers whose first language is not English. Given the large number of Rhode Islanders who are in need of ESOL, we suggest that the local plans be required to consider using the ARRA funds for a new contextualized training initiative, which integrates ESOL with high-growth occupational skills training and adopt the recently completed competitive grant process for this program as a model.

We also strongly support the plan to partner with the Office of Adult Education to create contextualized training programs in the areas of health care and green jobs. The plan should be more specific that this is targeted to individuals with lower literacy and math skills. We suggest that a population targeted to participate in this new program include "parents who are current or former recipients of RI Works (TANF) benefits."

The local workforce plans should include a requirement that they, too, invest new ARRA funds in training for lower-skilled workers and those in need of ESOL services.

The plan is generally silent as to any plans for training at the community college (except for a reference at p. 43 mentioning that plans by the local WIBS have not been finalized). This section of the plan should provide that local boards are encouraged to develop group training in areas of high need and to work with the community college and the industry partnerships to develop these programs.

3. p. 34-35: Is the target population of "individuals impacted by domestic violence who find themselves homeless and in shelter programs" the population intended to be served through the new pilot program with the Office of Adult Education? If so, we suggest that this is a too narrowly defined population. Women who are in shelters – regardless of the reason – should be eligible.

This section should more specifically identify how the ARRA funds are being used to either create new opportunities for training (e.g. the new initiative with the Office of Adult Education) or how the funds are used to

increase access (i.e., number of new “slots”) for existing initiatives targeting lower-skilled Rhode Islanders' and those in need of ESOL. As described above, we encourage the expansion of opportunities within recently created models like the Newport Skills Alliance and the contextualized Occupational Skills Training for adults in need of ESOL. The new ARRA funds should be used to encourage development of a “Newport Skills Alliance” model in other parts of the state. Organizing services for lower-skilled workers to gain the pre-training skills they need to succeed in industry-specific skills training and ensuring a pathway to both training and employment should be replicated.

The plan should include expanding training for RI Works (TANF) participants through the new on-line certificate training programs.

This section of the plan should describe how WIA-funded training initiatives are linked with ARRA initiatives around job training for jobs in energy efficiency. The new program at CCRI, for example should be described here.

4. p. 40: In describing the program for parents participating in the RI Works Program (TANF), the plan should describe the new plan to offer parents the opportunity to participate in on-line study for certificate programs.

Our last recommendation is that going forward the announcement of any RFP, plans, hearings and other information to which the public should have easy access also be posted on the state’s Office of Recovery and Reinvestment’s website in addition to being posted on the Department of Labor and Training’s website.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this plan. We appreciate the Department’s commitment to improving and expanding the workforce development system and look forward to continuing to work with you on these efforts.