

PA WDB Quarterly Board Meeting

Tuesday, November 10, 2020

10:00AM to 11:25AM

Skype

Meeting Minutes

Attendance

Members:

- Chair Jeff Brown
- Idayat Adewunmi
- Denise Andahazy
- Shannon Austin
- Senator Camera Bartolotta
- Tim Bean
- Richard Bloomingdale
- Julene Champion
- Representative Morgan Cephas
- Wendie DiMatteo-Holsinger
- Chekemma Fulmore-Townsend
- Nick Gilson
- James Harper, Jr.
- Brad Hollabaugh
- Sarah Hollister
- Timothy James
- Marguerite Kline
- Bob McAuliffe
- Secretary Teresa Miller
- Henry Nicholas
- Secretary Jerry Oleksiak
- Acting Secretary Noe Ortega
- Jodi Pace
- Tom Redden
- Secretary Russell Redding
- Gregg Riefenstahl
- JoAnne Ryan
- Frank Sirianni
- John "Ski" Sygielski
- Jessica Trybus
- Dionne Wallace-Oakley
- Laura Wand
- Yvette Watts
- Senator Lindsey Williams
- Matt Yarnell
- Deputy Secretary Allison Jones for Governor Tom Wolf
- Deputy Secretary Carol Kilko for Secretary Dennis Davin
- Billie Barnes for Commissioner Robert J. Harvie, Jr.
- Jonas Ricci for Representative Ryan Mackenzie
- David Miles for Secretary Robert Torres
- Amy Schwenk for Secretary John Wetzel

Presenters:

- Acting Secretary Noe Ortega, PA Department of Education
- Chair Chekemma Fulmore-Townsend, Youth Committee
- Chair Jeffrey Brown, Reentry Ad Hoc Committee
- Chair Rick Bloomingdale, Career Pathways and Apprenticeships Committee
- Chair John "Ski" Sygielski, Industry Partnerships and Employer Engagement Committee
- Chair Matt Yarnell, Healthcare Workforce Ad Hoc Committee

- Executive Director James Martini, Continuous Improvement Committee
- Chair Sarah Hollister, One-Stop Service Delivery System Committee
- Passle Helminski, Chair of the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council
- Secretary Jerry Oleksiak, PA Department of Labor and Industry
- Deputy Secretary Shelia Ireland, PA Department of Labor and Industry
- Executive Director Shannon Austin, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Dave Miles, PA Department of Aging
- Secretary Russell Redding, PA Department of Agriculture
- Deputy Secretary Carol Kilko, PA Department of Community and Economic Development
- Amy Schwenk, PA Department of Corrections
- Julie Kane, PA Department of Education
- Secretary Teresa Miller, PA Department of Human Services

Staff: Executive Director James Martini, Deputy Director Tracey Turner, Shuana Davis, Mary Hoskins, Michelle Lengel

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Brown called the meeting to order and asked Executive Director Martini to run through roll call. Executive Director Martini noted that he could see people that logged in online and proceeded to run through the phone numbers for those who called in.

Chair Brown then asked Acting Secretary Noe Ortega to introduce himself and what was going on in his area.

Acting Secretary Ortega said that he was glad to participate. He noted that around the career and tech ed space, Dr. Lee Burkett held an integrated conference which had a great number of participants. He said she was also monitoring the work around the federal Perkins V loan and a number of post-secondary partners had begun to submit their applications for 2021 grants. In addition, Perkins V does require post-secondary to lend support to the workforce development board as well. Around the Career Ready PA Coalition, Laura Fridirici has launched a number of virtual convenings as well as statewide sessions. In the adult education space, like many of the education providers it has really been a narrative of people pulling through the challenges of the pandemic and continuing to provide services to their adult students. In addition, it is helping them in the areas that require additional support as they manage both their continuing development academically, professionally, and personally with that of their young children as well. Lastly, in the space of elementary and secondary education, recommendations around changing the science standards had been taken to the PA WDB a couple of months ago and the process continued.

Chair Brown thanked him for his report and said he looked forward to him being on the Board.

Chair's Updates

Chair Brown said he was looking for a motion to approve the August 12, 2020 minutes.

MOTION: Secretary Jerry Oleksiak made the motion. Chekemma Fulmore-Townsend seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Brown then moved to committee updates but Dr. John Sygielski of the Industry Partnership and Employer Engagement Committee was having some technical difficulties.

Committee Update- Youth

Chair Chekemma Fulmore-Townsend remarked that upon the Board's approval of the joint recommendation on evaluation, the committee supported the development and distribution of an evaluation evidence survey to better understand how local programs have the capacity to measure results so that they could begin to prepare for capacity building and training for those programs. Those results were expected at the end of the month. Chair Fulmore-Townsend commented that she was hoping that at the next meeting they would have an update for the Board about how their programs were doing and what they would recommend for support for those programs.

Chair Fulmore-Townsend said they doubled down on understanding the impact of COVID-19 on opportunity youth, specifically by inviting the Aspen Institute to join the committee for a meeting to share impact and policy considerations for the population. She said the impact of the global pandemic and the economic downturn were predicted to be dire for young people between the ages of 16 and 24. She then highlighted a new report called A Decade Undone which estimates that this disruption will undo much of the progress made in that area over the last decade, increasing the needs for youth employment and training by the thousands. She highlighted that some of the policy considerations that the Aspen Institute suggested the committee explore and said they would continue to do so related to direct relief payments, affordable college tuition, and work to prepare a comprehensive policy agenda for young people. She said that motivated them to be really clear on the data that they have and the data that they need so they invited the Center for Workforce Innovation and Analysis to come to their last meeting and share what information they have relating to the goals and that leads them to their next focus of work. Their next focus is to determine and make any recommendations related to their evaluation capacity survey, to evaluate their current baseline related to the youth goals that are set, and to make any recommendations for data collection and integration of multiple sources of information for young people. She said they have been focusing on having strong data so that they can see where they started as a baseline but what the impact of COVID has been on the youth population and how they should target their limited resources moving forward.

Committee Update- Reentry Ad Hoc

Chair Brown noted that the Reentry Ad Hoc Committee update was in the briefing book and that the committee was continuing to work on the same things that they reported last time. He remarked that they hoped to have another recommendation by the next meeting.

Committee Update- Career Pathways and Apprenticeship

Chair Rick Bloomingdale highlighted that they continue to look for pilot programs to deal with barriers and individuals who may be facing so barriers to get onto a career pathway. That has been made particularly difficult during the pandemic and he knows the building trades unions have a number of openings as construction takes off and are setting up their apprenticeship schools for social distancing and providing all of the safety gear. Some employers have proximity sensors that employees wear so the technology that is going into safety on the job and the adaptation has been nothing short of remarkable. Another topic that they are looking at is how sometimes K-12 kids aren't aware of all wonderful

opportunities that are available to them outside of going to college. He noted that there are a lot of opportunities in manufacturing and in the building trades. He noted that Governor Wolf's Teacher in the Workplace program had been particularly successful. It had really taken off with teachers, particularly guidance counselors becoming aware of what was available for the kids and was an eye-opener.

Committee Update- Industry Partnerships and Employer Engagement

Chair "Ski" Sygielski commended Chair Brown on how he has come back from some tough times. Chair Brown thanked him. Chair Sygielski noted that for the committee summary could be found in the book and there was three general areas that they were focusing their efforts on all in support of WIOA Goal 2.4. They were focusing their efforts around the Next Generation Industry Partnerships and they are very critical in order to stay in touch with what employers are doing. They can develop partnerships and bring people together so that the engagement of the employers can provide necessary input that they need for the operations of the One-Stop systems.

He noted that that is another area where they put their focus on in is encouraging the use of and increasing awareness, as the PA CareerLink® is not fully known yet. He said that once employers are engaged, overall they are satisfied as they have learned through surveys and it continues to be an area that they work on. Finally, aligning all of the policies, resources, and strategies together are very important as they work to strengthen employer engagement within the system. They are focused on developing and maintaining partnerships so it can benefit policies and procedures within the state and bringing employers together to share promising practices and be able to provide assistance to get to employees that need to be trained.

Committee Update: Healthcare Workforce Ad Hoc

Chair Matt Yarnell said that he didn't have much of a report beyond the fact that they passed two recommendations at the last Board meeting and they have a few areas where they want to dig in and keep working on them. He also reminded everyone that they had a crisis statement that they passed a few meetings ago. He noted that around 7 in 10 deaths related to COVID in Pennsylvania were in nursing homes. He said that they would likely see the workforce crisis there deepen as cases continued to rise so the work of the committee would be very important as they move through the winter.

Committee Update: Continuous Improvement

Executive Director Martini gave the update as Chair Funkhouser was unable to join the meeting. He noted that there were three big things that they were focusing on in the last quarter. A lot of it was working collaboratively with the state teams that are in charge of a lot of the system. The first was the CWDS project and were engaged with the state folks quite a bit on that where they can make improvements around intake for the customers. He said it is beneficial for the system to have a better understanding of what the customers that come in look like and what barriers they face. They also feel like it will give them a better opportunity to reflect performance of the system more accurately when they have a better idea of who the customers are that they are serving. Additionally, they were working with the Bureau of Workforce Development Administration and Dan Kuba and his team around the system of record policy as they worked to finalize that. They want to make sure that they are accurately capturing what happens in the system as best as they can while also respecting the privacy and data integrity of all of the participants they serve in the system. Finally, along with the Youth Committee they worked on the survey of all of the programs around their ability to effectively evaluate their programs with respect to the data

and evidence they collect. He mentioned that they already have over 100 responses to the survey and that was going on and would continue to be live until November 20th. He said they would be sure to provide a robust report-out of what they find from the survey. Chair Brown remarked that he thought that was the committee that was taking a look at technological improvements in the internet or systems approach. He said the purpose was to make it more friendly and modern and asked if they would be a report back. Executive Director Martini said they could make sure they had an update on it at the next quarterly meeting if it wasn't part of the report from the Department of Labor and Industry further along in the meeting.

Committee Update: One-Stop Service Delivery System

Chair Sarah Hollister commented that they were able to meet for the first time and had a great representation. She said the committee did feel that they needed to have more diverse opinions on the committee and were seeking employer and customer representatives. She said they were also going to do a deeper dive into the system data available. She commented they would also continue to explore what their priority will be to enhance the work being done by the other committees. She said she was interested in taking recommendations from board members about employers and customers to be represented on the committee. Chair Brown asked if Executive Director Martini could help with that and Chair Hollister said that he had been helping.

Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council Presentation

Passle Helminski began her recruitment presentation. She noted that the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council's (PARC) mission was to inform and advise the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Legislature, and the Governor on issues affecting people with disabilities. She noted that she was giving the presentation because they are mandated to have one member from the PA Workforce Development Board be part of PARC. They are supposed to have 15 members and only had 13. She said to get and maintain federal funding they must have 15 members and that they would be appointed by the Governor. She commented 51% of the membership had to be someone with a disability and they can only serve two, three year consecutive terms. She said she was hoping that at least one PA WDB member applied. She said they had six standing committees and each member had to be in at least one. They form ad hoc committees as needed. Chair Brown asked if there were any questions and if anyone was interested. Chair Brown said that if anyone was interested to talk to James about it. Senator Williams asked what the other spot that they were looking to fill besides the Board spot. Ms. Helminski listed some spots that could be covered including education and special education. She noted that OVR had to review the applications. Senator Williams said she had some thoughts as to who could fill a spot. Chair Brown thanked Ms. Helminski for her presentation. Secretary Oleksiak noted that OVR is a part of the Department of Labor and Industry and he noted if there were questions, that they could help as well.

Agency Report- Department of Labor and Industry

Secretary Oleksiak noted that the Department was busy in dealing with the mitigation efforts and Unemployment Compensation. He said they were seeing a record number of claims, both through regular unemployment and through the programs available under the CARES Act. He said every time they seemed to be getting a handle on the numbers, they ran into various issues on the way including fraud. He said they were tapping into the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program and it was happening all over the country. Secretary Oleksiak remarked they were working closely internally as well as with the

vendors, other state, federal, and local authorities and they really got a handle on it. Secretary Oleksiak then gave a shoutout to the many employees working diligently on Unemployment Compensation. He said one of the things is that they know they are going to get through COVID and they were looking at the what the immediate future of work was going to look like and what the impact would be long term. He said that is a focus of the Department of Labor and Industry and the administration. He then invited Deputy Secretary Shelia Ireland to give her report.

Deputy Secretary Ireland noted that she wanted to cover three things. The first was the challenge of providing Rapid Response and in-person services at the PA CareerLink® during the pandemic; the second was the revitalization of the Apprenticeship and Training Office; and finally the efforts to raise diversity, equity, and inclusion as a key driver in their work. She said the pandemic dramatically shifted the landscape on how their direct services operate. It accelerated both volume and the vehicles they employ to provide services to a rapidly expanding customer base. The Rapid Response team was continuing to expand virtual services to address temporary and permanent layoffs throughout the Commonwealth and as of the Board meeting, 377 WARN notices were filed impacting over 70,000 workers. They were using all of the virtual meeting platforms to conduct information sessions with the effected workers but they do realize that not all customers had access to virtual services. They were therefore holding sessions at brick and mortar sites, broadcasting the virtual information meetings. Rapid Response was also engaging the PA CareerLink® Business Service Teams to continue to expand virtual job fairs as people were still be hired throughout the state. She then applauded the Rapid Response team as they had responded to more WARN notices in the last four months than they had received in the last four years. She said they were not the only frontline heroes at L&I as the PA CareerLink® continued to diversify their strategies to provide reemployment services in Pennsylvania. She said that as of the Board meeting, 43 PA CareerLink® offices had reopened their doors at limited capacity, mostly by appointment only. All of the offices had developed pandemic plans to maintain safety for their customers and safe. She said they were being tested though as they wrestled with increasing COVID exposures in the face of the recent surge. In the past two weeks before the Board meeting, they had to close or disinfect 6 different locations. Yet, even in the face of the pandemic, they were continuing to push on creative ways to expand their services. Some examples where that in the recent months, some local boards partnered with L&I to develop curbside assistance for workforce services and they were working to ensure that ever PA CareerLink® across the state had the capacity to provide that type of assistance. They would like to see that within a block of the PA CareerLink®, they would have broadband and Wi-Fi access. They were testing drive-thru job fairs in two workforce areas to assist employers with their recruitment efforts and were moving from a reactive to proactive stance by piloting, in five workforce areas across the state, their process around reaching out to customers who had recently filed UC claims. They would like to use claims data to tailor a more personalized outreach approach to connect them to services. Essentially, instead of waiting for people to contact PA CareerLink®, they were reaching out to them. Included in the pilot was training module geared towards using conversational skills in an empathetic manor to engage the customers.

One of the more exciting things going on at the Department of Labor and Industry was Tara Loew joining the deputate as the new Director of the Apprenticeship and Training Office. She said Ms. Loew was bringing a wealth of workforce development and program management experience to the ATO and they were lucky to have her. Deputy Secretary Ireland said that apprenticeships sit at the center of the longer term strategy for getting Pennsylvanians back to work. Recently in support of that, they released \$6 million of PAsmart grant funding to organizations across Pennsylvania. The ATO continues to perform

despite its staffing challenges, having added another 221 apprentices and had reached 156% of their goal for their 4 year grant. The ATO continued to service 861 active programs and over 18,000 registered apprenticeships.

The last thing that that Deputy Secretary Ireland highlighted was that they were leaning in on their efforts to raise diversity, equity, and inclusion as a key driver in their work. The bureaus of Workforce Development Administration, Workforce Partnership Operations, the Board, and OVR had assembled a diverse workgroup partnering to connect additionally underserved Pennsylvanians with employment and training opportunities. She said that shortly they would see a survey coming out and they were trying to uncover promising practices that serve communities of color with greater cultural fluency and effectiveness so that the state and the One-Stops can reach more people and better serve Pennsylvanians from underserved communities and communities of color. Deputy Secretary Ireland asked the board to review the updates on the opioid grant and the ECHO grant.

Chair Brown asked if there were questions. Chair Brown said that he had a lot of businesses that were saying they couldn't get workers and if the state was trying to connect workers that lost their job in light of a WARN notice to the jobs that were open in the state. Deputy Secretary Ireland said absolutely and that is what part of what the Rapid Response team does. She said they respond to a specific organization that is closing or laid off employees and make the employees aware of opportunities in the area. She said a lot of organizations have a lot to do from an HR perspective and that the ground shifted under a lot of industries and there are cutting edge, proactive approaches that HR needs to make to effectively connect. She said that PA is also long overdue to start addressing the digital divide and with employers working primarily through digital platforms to engage prospective employees. She said they can't ignore that in Philadelphia, 25% of households don't digital access, not even a smartphone. She said they wouldn't get around digital literacy where 67% of people are characterized as not being digital literate. She said it is less that employers can't find who they need but more they can't find who they need in the traditional way. She said part of the work that needs to be done is to lean into the moment and find new ways or develop new practices that become the norm for practice in terms of connecting people to jobs and opportunities. Chair Brown asked if there were any other questions and there were none. He thanked Secretary Oleksiak and Deputy Secretary Ireland for the presentation and for trying to help citizens during these difficult times.

Agency Report- Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

Executive Director Shannon Austin then provided an update on the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. She remarked that they currently have 3,986 individuals that are currently on the closed order of selection and they are working with the Governor to try to get approval to remove individuals off that waiting list so they can begin to serve them. To date, they had removed close to 10,000 individuals off of the waiting list so they were anticipating removing more and getting the approval. She said that just in September, they did have the ability to go after additional reallocation funds from the state perspective and they were able to pull down an additional \$27 million for the VR program which they were very excited to do. She said it would allow them to serve more customers and their hope was that in the spring if they were on a continuing resolution that they could open the order at some point. She remarked that they had done a lot of internal work getting people placed into employment and cleaning up internally within the agency so that they can serve and have put internal controls in place. She said they were anticipating an RSA monitoring report that was from August 2019, so they were waiting on that to go public. She said they

were working with them and other areas to work on deficiencies within the agency. She commented that during the summer to the current time, they had the opportunity to work with the Bureau of Special Education of PDE in developing an MOU. She said she was happy to say that they had a signed MOU and they were hoping to have supplement documentation roll out in the spring where there is crossover for students that are 14 to 21 years of age and what covers with PDE under IDEA and what covers OVR under WIOA working with those students under pre-employment transition services. They were also working on a toolkit that will go alongside the MOU to do outreach to parents and key stakeholders to do cross-training among OVR and PDE staff to make sure they understand what the MOU is, who's responsible for what and how they are going to serve the kids. It will also be focused on what it looks like when OVR is invited to IEPs in particular and what can students and parents anticipate, so they have parents' part of the stakeholder group working through the marketing material but also they have tech support to also work through that.

Executive Director Austin said they continue to have HGAC (Hiram G. Andrews Center) open as they are still continuing to work with students and they were at about half capacity because of the mitigating measures they were taking. She remarked they didn't have any breakouts or students getting COVID and the team did an amazing job following protocols. She said the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing continued to work vigorously with the Department of Health and the Governor's Office to do the updates and make sure that the necessary interpreters are there so that consumers can get the information. She noted they had an internal diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative that they rolled out at the beginning of the year. They were finalizing their five year plan with it and had an internal benchmark done. Chair Brown said it seemed like they made great progress in getting people off of the waiting list. Chair Brown asked how the Board can help get the last people off of the waiting list. Executive Director Austin said that they go through the funding and she just needs to submit the plans. She said they need to make sure they have the capacity and they hope to go month to month.

Agency Report- Department of Aging

David Miles said he didn't have anything to report in addition to the report in the packet.

Agency Report- Department of Agriculture

Secretary Russell Redding provided the report for the PA Department of Agriculture. He remarked that the week of the Board meeting was National Apprenticeship week and he had joined Deputy Secretary Ireland in a panel discussion about apprenticeship's value to agriculture and the food system in the state. He said they were able to highlight the three apprenticeships they had as well as some apprentices. He noted that he was pleased to report that they had received word that one of their businesses in Western PA that was using the National Landscape Management Apprenticeship program had the first female graduate and there was only four in the US total. He added that since the last meeting, the US Department of Agriculture announced they are discontinuing the Agricultural Labor Survey and its quarterly farm labor report. The survey and report had been used to set the adverse effect wage rates for the H2A program. He said the Department of Labor on November 1st issued a notice for the new rule for updating the methodology in determining the annual wage rate. He said that for the vast majority of agriculture jobs, the rule stabilizes the rate through the calendar year of 2022 by using the average hourly wages for field and livestock workers as reported by the US Department of Agriculture on the survey that was published in 2019. In 2023 it will pick up again. He said that their current adverse effect wage rate is about \$13.34. Secretary Redding remarked they were looking at that change because it is aimed at stabilizing wages and

there had been concerns from employers about the inconsistency of those rates. He said they had reported before on the Commission on Ag Education Excellence and welcomed Secretary Ortega who serves as the co-chair with him. They were focused on the agricultural education programs in Pennsylvania with a workforce development view of how it is their pipeline and pathway. He said they also were continuing their work on equity, inclusion, and diversity. They were looking at how they can diversify the agricultural workforce and educational system. He commented there was also work being done by the Commission on Ag Education Excellence. Finally, they were working at the PA Farm Bill implementation with the programs like economic and workforce development.

Agency Report- Department of Community and Economic Development

Deputy Secretary Carol Kilko noted that they had continued collaboration with a number of agencies including the Department of Labor and Industry. She noted that Secretary Davin had been working with DCED staff and they were doing industry outreach calls and they had included representatives from the Department of Labor and Industry, the Department of Health, and PEMA. One of their larger programs in volume of applications through the CARES Act was the hazards pay program where they provided three dollars per hour for those that were frontline workers under certain industries. She said they had over 10,000 applications for the program in nearly \$900 million in requests for a total of \$50 million that was available to them. She said they continued to work through that program. A lot of the healthcare programs were able to apply and were awarded. She remarked a lot of them had never done business with state government before. She said they must have all of the money out by the November 30th deadline. She said the Brookings Institute did say that the hazards pay program should be modeled by other states and that the administration was proud of that. Finally, Deputy Secretary Kilko remarked that their Workforce and Economic Development Network (WEDNET) program that provides training dollars for incumbent workers was alive and well. The businesses across the commonwealth are training their employees.

Agency Report- Department of Corrections

Amy Schwenk noted that their report was in the briefing book but that she wanted to mention a few more things. She said COVID was impacting their reentrants heavily. Their overall employment numbers for reentrants were down and they were working with them and connecting with industry partners to connect those individuals. Their workforce development specialist, Dorenda Hamarlund was continuing to reach out and conduct virtual presentations on the benefits of hiring reentrants and continues to coordinate with the community on those initiatives. She noted that in October they met with the Kutztown Business and Manufacturing Roundtable via Zoom and provided an update on the benefits of hiring reentrants and they were going to circle back with them in 2021. She said they updated a page on their website to have all of their resources and contacts highlighted. Also, their reentry fairs inside of the institutions had been halted and they have participated in them virtually. The week of December 7th through the 11th they were holding a weeklong reentry fair with all of their SCIs. She said they had a lot of community partners and inmate participating. They started a reentry services office pilot in January 2020 at SCI Houtzdale and was basically a one-stop shop for inmates at the institution to begin their reentry efforts. She said it was really valuable for them to begin connecting to community partners that are staffed with a parole agent, a reentry specialist, or a social worker that helps them with connections in the community. Ms. Schwenk commented that it was a successful pilot and within the first two months 250 inmates participated in the program and was well received. She said it was rolled out to all of the SCIs two weeks before the November Board meeting. Finally, she remarked they had on the ground for some time at SCI Phoenix, a female

transition unit and had been vacant until September 2020 when they did start receiving females. She said it was exciting as their female institutions were at SCI Muncy up north and SCI Cambridge Springs near Erie so this unit allows inmates that are close to getting out into the community back into the community in which they came from. She said she expected to expand and get them involved in the community. Chair Brown asked if at SCI Phoenix the males and females were separated. Ms. Schwenk responded that it is a completely separate unit and is outside of the perimeter of the male unit at SCI Phoenix. Chair Brown thanked her for her update.

Agency Report- Department of Education

Chair Brown asked Julie Kane if she had any additional information to add onto what Secretary Ortega had reported earlier in the meeting. Ms. Kane said that she did not and that Secretary Ortega did a great job at explaining everything.

Agency Report- Department of Human Services

Secretary Teresa Miller said that as their report notes, they once again were trying to get word out about their programs during the pandemic. She said they were seeing a growth in enrollment for their Medicaid and SNAP programs since February and they were using every opportunity afforded to them to provide additional assistance wherever possible. She remarked they had a good partnership with the Department of Education over the spring to fill the gap as students who participated in the National School Lunch program. With kids at home they weren't able to get breakfast and lunch at school so they were able to get funding to those families to cover that. She said with the recent action by Congress, they were able to continue the program for 2021 to assist with the ongoing need. They were able to get additional SNAP payments out to SNAP households that did not receive the maximum household amount. They had been pushing to provide additional benefits to those who don't receive the maximum household amount which was about 40% of the lowest income SNAP recipients. She said they were in a legal battle over it as the USDA was fighting them over it. They were insisting that any amounts they were paying out would have to be reimbursed if they lost in court. She said those were not amounts that they would not be able to reimburse as it was \$82 million a month.

During the pandemic they were able to start a SNAP online purchasing pilot and were in the fifth month of the pilot. In October their transactions increased to 2.95% of all SNAP transactions which was up from about a point and a half in the first month so it was about \$10 million and close to 142,000 transactions. They also implemented a LIHEAP crisis recovery program during the summer to help with utility bills and that was funded through federal CARES Act dollars. She said they were working closely with the Department of Labor and Industry to develop strategies and ways to outreach to people who might be losing their unemployment benefits to make sure they are aware of DHS programs. She said that now they are somewhat getting back to business as usual, they are reestablishing their Medicaid Work Supports program. It is a program that systematically connects Medicaid enrollees who are interested in employment and training opportunities with the PA CareerLink®, County Assistance Office, or their managed care organization for further engagement. They launched the program back in February. They did have some elements of the program stop for awhile because of the pandemic but some of them did continue. All of the components of the program are to be up and running by the end of November. They have seen an average of 860 people per week seeking those resources. She said as more people in the coming months were going to be looking for employment supports; the new program is in place.

Secretary Miller also mentioned the work expense deduction that they recently implemented to better support TANF recipients as they enter the workforce. It will allow the TANF recipients to have a longer transition into the workforce. She said they hope between that action and the employment training redesign that they had talked about before that they would be able to do a better job at supporting the population and reducing the churn they see in the program. She said the data shows that half of the people that leave TANF for a job are back in the program within a year. The hope is with some of the changes they are making that it will change that. She commented they are also focusing on their racial equity work. She said she was excited to hear so many other agencies talk about it. Secretary Miller then remarked that since the last meeting, DHS had implemented a racial equity steering committee that is going help them identify ways in which they can make DHS a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable workplace. They had several meetings where they looked at data and all steering committee members were going through a training so they would have the tools to address issues and hopefully put in place solutions to address the disparities. She said they were starting to look internally and all of the program offices are also focusing on addressing disparities that they know exist in program office areas. Chair Brown asked what the timeline was on the lawsuit. Secretary Miller said that they have a verdict and the federal government has taken the position of if they will in court then the commonwealth needs to reimburse the funds. Secretary Miller said they don't have the funds to reimburse that and that she doesn't have a timeline for where it will end up going. She remarked that they were supporting CLS in the lawsuit. Secretary Miller said they want to get the money out but can't risk the \$82 million a month at that point. Chair Brown asked if the current position was that they weren't sending any money out until the issue is adjudicated. Secretary Miller said or if they could get comfortable that they wouldn't have to reimburse the federal government. She said they were having conversations with CLS about how real that threat is. She said they are trying to work it out as quickly as possible. Chair Brown asked if it was also political. Secretary Miller said it was possibly and they have a couple of months until they could talk to someone who could give them assurances.

Public Comments

Passle Helminski thanked the Board for letting her present and noted that their next meeting was Wednesday, November 18th . She said their PA CareerLink® committee needed someone from the Board to participate. Chair Brown reiterated that Senator Williams had some thoughts as to who could serve. Ms. Helminski reiterated that they needed to have someone from the PA Workforce Development Board.

Chair Brown sought a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Senator Camera Bartolotta made the motion to adjourn. Wendie DiMatteo-Holsinger seconded. The motion passed unanimously.