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**BEFORE THE
EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE SAFETY SUBCOMMITTEE**

**OF THE
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE**

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Thank-you Madam Chair, Senator Murray, Ranking member Senator Isakson, and members of the Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety, for the opportunity to present testimony on how the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 served as a catalyst for the design and implementation of a comprehensive workforce development system in Georgia. More importantly, I am convinced that the philosophy and funding provided by WIA can be leveraged to provide critical employment and training services to millions of unemployed and under-employed Americans.

Since the mid 1930s, jobless Georgians applied for unemployment benefits and searched for jobs in "unemployment offices" whose design and function reflected Depression Era economic realities. Delivery of employment services to job seekers and employers was fragmented and confusing, because employment and training programs were "siloed" by federal funding streams.

The enactment of the Workforce Investment Act in 1998 provided an unprecedented opportunity for state and local jurisdictions to develop a more coordinated and efficient workforce development system. WIA provided for enhanced emphasis on customer choice, customer satisfaction, blended funding streams and integrated service delivery.

The Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL) embraced the WIA philosophy and letter of the legislation, and began the design and implementation of a fully integrated, comprehensive, state workforce development system. Our primary objective was the coordination of four major employment, training and income support programs: Wagner-Peyser Act, Employment Services (ES), Unemployment Insurance (UI), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and subsequently, the Workforce Investment Act.

The United States Employment Services program was established under the Wagner-Peyser Act in 1933 to help millions of jobless Americans find work

during the Great Depression. Two years later, the Unemployment Insurance program was enacted to provide temporary income support for unemployed workers. The Vocational Rehabilitation program was originally intended to help disabled World War I veterans find work; however its mission was broadened in 1920 to include all persons with disabilities.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 encouraged service integration between several federally-funded employment and training programs, via a one-stop career center network. Significantly, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provides an unprecedented investment of federal dollars in America's workforce development system.

Energized by the increased flexibility afforded by WIA, the GDOL charted a new course focused on improving the quality of service to our primary customers – job seekers, employers and economic developers. Georgia's new workforce development system was designed to serve a diverse and dynamic customer base as evidenced by the adoption of a "Universal Access" policy. A strategic commitment was made to ensure that all persons, including those with disabilities, would have equal access to employment, education and training resources.

Significant investments were made to strengthen the technological and programmatic linkages between the WIA, ES, UI and VR programs. The foundation of Georgia's workforce development system is comprised of three components: (1) a statewide network of one-stop career centers and satellite sites (2) an interactive technological infrastructure and (3) professionally trained, customer-focused staff. Although still a work-in-progress, Georgia's workforce development system is at the forefront of our state's efforts to address the economic challenges associated with the current recession.

Laying the Foundation

One-Stop Career Center Network

Georgia's WIA-inspired, one-stop network is the cornerstone of Georgia's workforce development system. Significant investments were made by GDOL and WIA partners in the establishment of a statewide network of one-stop career centers. The network consists of 46 full service designated one-stops and scores of additional service access points. As a result, jobseekers, employers and economic developers have greater access to a variety of employment services and related information.

Subsequent to the passage of WIA, a strategic decision was made to merge all existing GDOL offices into Georgia's one-stop system. The form and function of the department's 53 "unemployment offices" were redesigned and re-branded as GDOL Career Centers. Dull, depressing offices are being transformed into spacious, brightly colored, high tech, high touch one-stop career centers.

The transformation of the department's "unemployment offices" would not have been possible without the support and unprecedented financial assistance provided by Georgia's local WIA boards and staff. More than \$2.5 million were appropriated by 11 WIA areas to help underwrite the cost of retrofitting GDOL operated one-stops. Local WIA boards selected 32 of GDOL's 53 Career Centers as designated one-stops, while the remaining department offices serve as satellite one-stops. Over \$2 million in WIA one-stop grants were also awarded to technical colleges, libraries, nonprofit organizations, homeless shelters, transition centers and mobile service units to finance the development of an electronic network of satellite one-stops throughout the state.

The WIA philosophy of cooperation, service integration and blended funding streams also played a key role in Georgia's decision to utilize UI administrative assessment funds to offset longstanding Wagner-Peyser budget shorts. State law provides that 8 percent of UI employer taxes can be invested in helping UI claimants get back to work quickly. In FY 2009, more than \$25 million were appropriated to finance the hiring of career center job developers, counselors, administrative personnel and other employment related services.

Multi-agency partnerships are playing a key role in providing support services and connecting customers with employment and training resources. The location of local agencies and non-profit service providers in GDOL Career Centers has increased access and improved service delivery to our customers. An abbreviated listing of our one-stop partners includes: The Technical College System of Georgia, Local WIA partners, Experience Works, AARP, Economic Opportunity Authority, Job Corps, Meals on Wheels, Adult Literacy, Georgia National Guard, Disabled American Veterans Administration, Community Council on Aging, Fatherhood Initiative, Georgia Department of Family and Children Services, Homeless Advocacy Organizations, and Telemon Corporation.

Technology

Prior to the passage of WIA, Georgia utilized a Management Information System (MIS), to capture related customer data and employment and training activities. The system was not Web-enabled, which allowed users access on a limited system network. Although federally compliant in all areas, the MIS system allowed only for data collection and reporting, that was restricted to the varying funding silos.

The WIA mandated greater coordination and unified data collection by key workforce system partners. Accordingly, GDOL developed a more comprehensive data system known as the Georgia Workforce System (GWS). This web-enabled system encompasses data collection, storage and reporting capabilities for WIA, UI, and Wagner-Peyser services. Web access introduced enhanced remote participation in the system. Consistency in the method of collection, data type and reporting outcomes was significantly enhanced, along with shared use of information between funding silos and programs. State staff provided training to local and state workforce partners upon GWS deployment, with written guidance on new features and developments as needed.

The Georgia Workforce System (GWS) was developed in a Web-enabled, browser-based environment with reporting capability for WIA, ES, UI and VR. Customers provide basic demographic information once and comprehensive records are built, maintained and accessed throughout the service continuum. Data is housed in a relational database with the capability of interfacing with external systems.

System components include: a common intake system for key programs to facilitate the collection of customer information; assessing customer needs and tracking services and outcomes; system storage of basic demographic data, including work history, individual assessments, case management, employment plans and information, documenting the delivery of other services. An eligible provider list and consumer report card system required by WIA includes information about and access to service providers. Management and reporting modules enable local WIA agencies to meet federal requirements for performance accountability as well as the production of quarterly and annual reports. An employer information system also enables GDOL staff and partners to document employer services, coordinate job development visits and provide relevant employer information.

GDOL serves a growing number of customers through its Web site (www.dol.state.ga.us) by offering over 800 electronic pages of employment and training information, including a variety of online services, forms, publications, and links to additional resources. GDOL also electronically advertises job fairs, employer seminars and other events. Additionally, the department provides easy access to a variety of labor market resources and information for businesses.

A major effort was made to increase accessibility for Georgians with disabilities by continually improving and expanding our Web-based services. The Georgia Rehabilitation Online Works (GROW) system allows staff to provide enhanced case management services to customers with disabilities. This electronic system creates a record of seamless service delivery to a targeted

population. In addition to case management, GROW documents assessments, disability determinations, referrals to other partner agencies, service outcomes and follow-up.

The GWS is supported by trained professional staff that provide daily support and technical assistance on data management and reporting issues. The state also provides local systems with critical performance tools, including WebFOCUS software, through which standard and ad-hoc data queries help local systems track and manage customer activities and outcomes. Flexibility of the GWS is evidenced by the recent and expedient alterations necessitated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The GWS will serve as the primary means to document the services and positive impacts of Georgia's ARRA activities.

Human Capital

The successful implementation of WIA is dependent on the development and enhancement of professional workforce development staff. Dedicated staff, empowered to build partnerships with other agencies and employers, are a key component of a successful workforce development system. Considerable education and training investments were made to encourage GDOL employees to embrace the holistic philosophy of integrated service delivery. To achieve this goal, extensive statewide and local training, including cross-training among agencies and partners, was developed and provided to all professional staff.

Ongoing training is conducted to ensure that workforce staff is able to effectively navigate and help job seekers, employers and economic developers utilize the system. Our comprehensive training program includes: new staff orientation, customer service training, college intern program, International Association of Workforce Professionals, Georgia Rehabilitation Association, Executive Commitment to Leadership program, education assistance program, Georgia Workforce Conference, Georgia Safety Conference, and the Georgia Employer Committee Conference. In service training is provided to address diversity, use of workforce information and technology, problem solving, and marketing of department services.

In 2007, the department launched a Learning Management System which houses the on-line GDOL Learning Center. The Learning Center provides 24/7 universal access to "knowledge repositories" which enables employees to receive "just in time" training necessitated by changing marketplace conditions. Self-directed training empowers all employees with the ability to develop and manage personal learning plans designed to enhance competency in leadership development, customer service, technology skills and workforce information. This strategy has helped eliminate departmental "training silos" and created a unified

“learning community” the department and partner agencies. The Learning Center is fully accessible for persons with disabilities who utilize assistive technology devices.

The Service Continuum

Georgia’s workforce development system provides job seekers and employers with a continuum of services that can be customized to meet individual needs. The three phases of the continuum are (1) Core Services, (2) Intensive Services and (3) Training. Support and assistance are provided based on a triage approach that enables staff to direct customers to appropriate employment and training resources. Core services are available to customers through self-service and/or staff assisted support.

Self-Directed Core Services

Self-directed services include: online filing for UI, free Internet access, job listings, copiers, telephone, fax machines, resource personnel, language services, language line, forms and other publications, e-mail, resume software, on-line job applications, word processing, books and videos, clothes closet, kiddie corner, labor market information, career counseling, comprehensive assessments, testing, workshops on job interviewing, resume writing, job search, negotiation and conflict resolution, case management and specialized workshops for veterans, persons with disabilities and rehabilitated ex-offenders.

Intensive Services

Intensive services are highly structured and offered to customers who have significant barriers to employment. Services include comprehensive assessments, adult basic education, internships, intensive job search, supportive services, trade adjustment assistance, etc. These services are designed to address targeted populations with specific barriers to employment, such as rehabilitated ex-offenders, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families recipients, dislocated workers, youth, veterans, homeless individuals, vocational rehabilitation, non-custodial parents and unemployment claimants.

Training Services

Training programs help job seekers who require skill development or enhancement services in order to qualify for new employment opportunities. Services may include occupational skills training, on-the-job training, entrepreneurial training, job readiness training, customized training, adult education, etc.

Services for Employers

Employer services include: designated employer interviewing space, recruitment, screening, interviewing, job order taking, referral of job seekers, UI seminars, access to Internet, fax, employer committees, seminars on immigration law and workplace safety.

Summary

Georgia's strategic decision to design and implement a fully integrated, comprehensive workforce development system has been effective in helping unemployed Georgians return to work. The Georgia Department of Labor and our workforce partners were successful in helping 295,231 jobseekers return to work between July 1, 2007 and June 30, 2008. Although our state, like much of the nation has been hit hard by the current recession, 66 percent of those who registered with the department secured employment. Of those who secured employment, 80 percent were still working six months later.

The Georgia Department of Labor and our state workforce partners have received numerous awards and citations including: the American Institute Full Employment Award, the National Foundation for Unemployment Compensation & Workers Compensation's J. Elred Hill, Jr. Award, USDOL's Large States Awards for Performance Excellence in Tax Operations and Performance Excellence in Appeals Decisions, Letter of Commendation from Region 3 Employment And Training Division, Outstanding Performance Award from the Federal Bonding Program and national honors for helping non-custodial parents, TANF recipients and rehabilitated ex-offenders find employment.

The Georgia philosophy of workforce development is simple: WIA, UI, ES, VR and other employment and training partners must work together to ensure that job seekers, employers and economic developers receive the highest quality of service. More importantly, we are proud to be part of a national workforce

development system that is focused on helping unemployed Americans get back to work.

Recommendations

The following WIA modernization recommendations are submitted for your consideration:

- (1) A top priority for WIA reauthorization should be clearly defining the purpose and mission of the Wagner-Peyser ES program. The Employment Services program should be fully funded because it is the backbone of America's workforce development system. Incentive funding should be made available to states and local jurisdictions to encourage multi-agency service delivery and coordination.
- (2) National Youth strategy should emphasize partnering with state and local drop out prevention programs, such as the highly successful Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) Program. Georgia is a proud affiliate of the JAG program that emphasizes education, training and career preparation as a dual track for high school students. Notably, participants in Georgia's 2008 JGG senior class achieved a graduation rate of 95%, twenty percentage points higher than the state's 2008 graduation rate!
- (3) Invest unspent ARRA stimulus funds in the development of a national Transitional Jobs Program for WIA, ES, VR and UI customers that will stimulate private sector job creation and hiring. Georgia Works is a transitional jobs program that allows UI claimants to receive eight weeks of on-the-job training while continuing to receive UI benefits. During its six-year history, 60 percent of the trainees have been hired prior to the expiration of their training period.

Thank you for your service to America, and for your time and attention.