

MassHire Bristol Workforce Board  
Quarterly Meeting  
December 18, 2025

In Attendance: Carl Garcia (chair), Natasha Azavedo, Steve Benson, Marilyn Boyle, Tim Burke, Paul Dumouchel, Charlie Merrow, Pat Emsellem, Maria Ferreira-Bedard, Michael O'Sullivan, Jim Pimental, Richard Shafer, Kris Silva, Lou Sousa, Joe Viana

Guests: Judy Bower, Sedgwick Harris, Holly Hill-Batista, Nancy Labonte, Sally Pais, Robert Rezendes, Melissa Zeitz, Alex Magalhaes

Staff: Thomas Perreira, Maria Frazier, Nick Church

Maria Frazier confirmed presence of quorum in accordance with the MassHire Bristol WB By-Laws. Mr. Garcia called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Before approving the minutes of the September 25, 2025 board meeting, it was noted that a name correction needed to be made to the minutes. With no other changes or amendments noted, motion was made to approve the minutes. Motion was seconded and passed.

Mr. Perreira reviewed labor market data reports for youth employment, noting that the unemployment rate for 16-19 year olds seeking jobs is 12.7%, and for 20-24 year olds it is 8.5%. Noting that the overall rate is 3.4%. He noted that 37% of 16-19 year olds are in the workforce, while for 20-24 year olds it is 76.5%. Mr. Perreira noted that out of school youth tend to have multiple barriers and challenges. He noted that out of school youth is comprised of 70% younger youth and 30% older youth, noting that 67% are high school drop outs.

Mr. Perreira noted that the Bristol Workforce Board applied for the Gateway Cities Youth Employment Network Pilot grant and was one of four boards awarded. The grant is aimed at enhancing youth employment opportunities throughout the state. The four workforce boards were awarded \$75,000 to develop innovative approaches to youth engagement, employer partnerships, and career readiness. He noted that MH Bristol is the lead on the grant, and includes the city of Fall River and Taunton as two of the partners, along with employers and the MH Bristol Career Centers. Mr. Perreira noted that the goal for the Bristol Workforce area in FY' 26 is 50 additional unsubsidized placements, and at least 50% of those placements be in for-profit companies. He noted that he will be reaching out to private sector board members to discuss any hiring opportunities they have or might have in the future.

Ms. Batista noted that the Fall River Career Center has served 4,689 customers to date, which is on par with the previous year. She noted the unemployment rate for the state

is 4.5%, Bristol 4.6%, Fall River 5.5%, Taunton 5.2%, and Attleboro 4.6%. She noted that currently the career center has five Career Specialist positions open, with interviews beginning in January. She noted that the state is looking to develop a new system to serve customers, but could be a few years away. She noted that the career center also has staff involved in the process, and noted there may be an opportunity to engage board members in the future of the new system. Mr. Perreira noted there is a different dynamic on how customers are being served now, opposed to several years ago, will probably be different in the future. It was noted that some people have a hard time maneuvering through the system when trying to get assistance. Ms. Batista noted that the education department and workforce development should be working closer together to resolve problems maneuvering through the system. She noted that agencies' systems should be able to communicate with each other so people can be directed to the right agency needed.

Mr. Perreira noted that adult education has always been a critical part of workforce development, noting that many BWB partners have clients in need of adult education. Ms. Labonte from Bristol Community College noted that their program is serving close to 650 students, with about 260 working toward their GED. She noted they have 50 people enrolled in the ESOL program. She noted that the programs help students prepare for the workforce industry. Ms. Labonte noted that the ESOL class is fully enrolled right now, and the ABE classes are getting more interest for on-line classes.

Ms. Bedard from SER-Jobs, noted they provide 150 slots for ESOL classes. They are currently serving 250 students and have 900 people on the waiting list. She noted that SER partners with headstart to provide ESOL to parents and provides GED classes to youth through WIOA, serving 75 annually. Ms. Bedard noted there is some demand for virtual options, along with in-person and are providing that. She noted that over 12,000 people participate in ESOL classes and it has become a priority in the state. She noted that in July, the state announced they will be investing \$10 mil to expand access to workforce training programs for over 3,000 residents. ESOL would also be expanded to serve 4,000 – 5,000 individuals over the next two years. She noted that some of the funding has already been allocated to some providers in the Boston and Central areas.

Mr. Perreira noted that the state approved the BWB's Performance Measures for FY'26. Any board members who would like more detail regarding the budget can contact Mr. Perreira.

Mr. Perreira reviewed YouthWorks funding for FY' 27. The maximum amount of funding that can be requested is \$950,400, down from \$1,379,000. The number of youth anticipated to be served is 171. Mr. Perreira noted that additional funding can be requested to serve additional youth.

The next full board meeting is scheduled for March 26, 2026. Mr. Perreira noted that the original date of March 19, conflicts with the state workforce board meeting.

Meeting adjourned.