



**Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board**  
**Quarterly Workforce Board Meeting**  
**April 24, 2025**  
**Approved July 24, 2025**

**Board Members Present:** Cathy Witherspoon, Chair; Sue LeClair; Trampas Hutches; Chris Winstead, Treasurer & Chair of Resources; Diane Frigon; Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment; Charlie Woodworth; Brandi Farrington; Bobbi Avery; Razell Ward, Secretary; Kelly Aho; Billi Mitchell; Chris Waite; Kelly Aho; Nikki Bevans

**Board Members Absent:** Laurie Glidden, At-Large Member/Youth Chair; Josh Henry; Bruce Tisdale; Sam Hight; Adam Wilson; Kate Durkin

**Staff Present:** Erin Benson, Executive Director; Carrie Parker, Administrative Assistant

**Others Present:** Joe Pietroski, Kennebec County Commissioner; Robert Sezak, Somerset County Commissioner; Jeff Gilbert, Franklin County Commissioner; Erica O'Toole, EMDC; Susan Cerini, EMDC; Leah Gulliver, EMDC; Deanna Patridge, MDOL; Sara King, Timber HP; Erica Watson, MDF

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**1. Welcome and Introductions:**

Cathy opened the meeting at 8:32am

**VOTED:** To approve January 23, 2025, meeting minutes as written.

**Motion:** Chris Winstead

**Second:** Razell Ward

**Vote:** All in Favor

Everyone took a few moments to provide introductions as Nikki Bevans was in attendance for her first initial meeting as a new board member representing healthcare. Nikki is the Talent Acquisition Manager at Central Maine Healthcare and was recommended by board member Monique Roy. Nikki stated that talent acquisitions are vital toward recruitment as the standard efforts no longer work and workforce and recruitment go together, so building a pipeline is important. She is a strong believer that workforce development programs and building those pipelines from high school all the way up through college and into the workforce are important. She's been in healthcare recruitment for 4-5 years and most of her experience is in healthcare recruitment, however she worked at BIW as well and is familiar with the trades also.

**2. Service Provider Report-EMDC-Leah**

Leah gave an update on the work EMDC had done over this last quarter and stated that the team's hard work being put into processing referrals and registrations is reflected in the numbers with adult enrollments at 182, which includes carry-ins and represents 123% of their goal. There are 51 dislocated workers representing 92% of their goal which was originally set at 55% so they exceeded that goal for new enrollments. They also exceeded their goal for youth enrollments with 103 or 118.4% with 72 new enrollments and a majority of out of school youth making up the enrollments as is commonplace. Quest enrollments were at 159 and 128% of the goal and were up from the last quarter. EMDC is looking to transfer funds from dislocated workers to adults to make use of those funds and continue to serve their programs for adults.

The BES (Bureau of Employment Services) and youth centered “My Maine Futures” campaign resulted in the largest number of referrals for the quarter. BES referrals have the highest engagement and enrollment rate, and by engagement rate Leah means when EMDC staff communicate with them, they respond and can move forward with the processes for them.

Erin’s work connecting EMDC to new opportunities and outreach has been helpful, and they are hoping to move some of that work forward into the next quarter. They have adjusted the response time to allow staff enough time to be able to continue to work with people who are enrolled as there are bigger numbers in this quarter so that it takes up a lot of time to properly serve those people. Cohort training continues to be a major factor in EMDC successes, Leah stated that it is a lot of initial work on the front end, but that it is worth it when they see people moving through various programs and other programs coming to fruition like CDL, CAN, CCMA, Healthcare Pathways, Pre-apprenticeship programs and more that continue to be in high demand. They saw a few new cohorts this quarter for Industrial Sewing and Culinary Arts. They developed 15 new work experiences and had 13 youth participants enrolled in the Young Mainers Workforce Program under self-directed objectives. They also established 4 new On-The-Job training contracts, and the businesses were Reed and Reed, Messer, Frederickson Farms and Legends Sports Bar and Grill.

EMDC implemented case reviews with staff for education and focused on opportunities to support customers with the services EMDC provides which include job search, career exploration and supportive services and training. Leah has been working on a deep dive to make EMDC more connected to the spending concerns and needs with draw down funds. There is often a delay in the work that they are producing and working on versus what ends up in the draw down each time so this is a large area of focus right now.

Some barriers that are not new but continue to be things EMDC staff work on with the customers are youth engagement and the difficulty with reaching the folks who aren’t connected to services. EMDC continues to look at new ideas on how to connect with these people and on more training providers to assist with access. There is a lot of movement for free tuition programs that are impacting referrals because a lot of people are not aware that EMDC can help with support services and guidance. They are addressing this with the training providers to help reinforce those referrals. Internal turnover resulting in higher individual case loads for staff was previously an issue, but there have been a few new hires recently and more joining in May which will help. Access to transportation services continues to be another ongoing barrier that they hear from both customers and businesses. EMDC continues to look at new ideas to help support access to reliable transportation. Higher vehicle repair costs and a lack of emergency housing assistance are also a barrier that continues to affect customers.

Erica finished the report with a success story on a 17-year-old participant named Cameron. She graduated high school early at the end of September from Hinkley and was adamant she wanted to do the CAN training. However, after a lengthy conversation Erica mentioned that it sounded like Cameron was interested in working with animals. This led them in a new direction where Cameron ended up doing work experience at the Somerset Humane Society and was asked to

stay onboard after the work experience ends. She is still at the Humane Society and is looking at completing Vet Tech training. During this experience she was able to open her own bank account and got a vehicle as well as looking at joining KVCC in the fall. Leah jumped in to explain that with Erica thinking outside the box with Cameron, who has a lot of support challenges in her life and showing her that support made a huge difference in her success.

Erin stated that several years ago we had the Opioid grant with a goal of reaching 158 individuals, which we did not meet and because of this she was nervous about enrollments for the Quest grant as they were lagging. She has been routinely meeting with EMDC about how many people they need to enroll in each quarter, and so far, the highest was 23 in quarter 4 with the need to enroll no less than 21 people each quarter to reach the 158-enrollee goal by the end of the grant. She was blown away and congratulated EMDC on reaching 50 enrollments this quarter. She sent a special congratulations to Marianne Young who works with a lot of cohorts and did a lot of the work to make these numbers happen.

The other piece Erin mentioned was specific to the board around OJTs (on-The-Job Trainings). When she was in Lewiston recently and went to lunch at Legends Sports Bar and Grill with staff from EMDC they were able to talk to the owner when she came to their table to check on their service about OJTs and how it could benefit her business. From this exchange they were able to set up 2 OJTs with her at Legends. This proves that you can never sell yourself and the services we provide enough to businesses and those around you no matter where you are.

Billi asked if EMDC has investigated programs like GoMaine to help with the transportation issues for participants. Susan stated that it is a great suggestion and though she knows there have been conversations around it she is not sure what is being done to move forward. She does feel that looking at programs like GoMaine are worth continuing to reach out to for supports. She also stated that when looking at the goals and numbers it is important to remember the partnerships and outreach that make that happen. Working with BES, adult ed, many of the other partnering programs truly help with increasing numbers and it is important to always remember what each of us brings to the table that we may not even think about or how that helps each other.

Erin stated that EMDC is still spending out their PY23 funds and still have additional funds which they can dig into if needed, but that when looking at adult and dislocated worker funds there is an opportunity to shift funding around. There is a significant increase in adults that we're serving at this time who are typically low income and have more barriers than dislocated workers who usually come to us because they have lost their job and need to get into something else and may need supportive services to make that happen and can typically find employment opportunities sooner than the adults we serve. Barriers for adults like vehicle repair, increases to provider and vendor services increase the costs that come with these people. We can transfer unused dislocated worker funds to our adults and ensure that we spend both funds out by the end dates for PY23 and before we start using the PY24 funds.

**VOTED:** To approve EMDC's request for transfer of funds from dislocated workers to adult services.

**Motion:** Razell Ward

**Second:** Charlie Woodworth

**Vote:** All in Favor

### **3. Financial Update: PY24 budget**

Sara was unable to attend the meeting, so Erin gave a brief overview of the PY24 budget to the board. Erin gave a short explanation to everyone about how various grants provide the budget and that each grant has a start and end date for receiving and spending out the funds. When looking at the WIOA funds we need to spend out all the PY23 funds before we can start spending on PY24 funds, which we are beginning to do with the completion of the spending for the Career grant and most of the Quest grant continuing to be used. In some cases, like the dislocated worker grant, the board cannot spend a higher percentage than the service provider spends. This is the case with the Quest grant, the board is holding back spending until EMDC catches up to what we've already spent on that grant where the board has spent 68% but EMD has only spent 55%.

Regarding the rest of the budget and spending, as Sara explained at the Operations Committee meeting at the beginning of the month, we are right on track as far as the board spending is concerned. There is some concern around EMDC spending and their ability to spend out their funds before the end dates, but Erin and Sara continue to meet with them on a regular basis and keep a close eye on things around that since the PY23 needs to be spent by June 30<sup>th</sup> and the Quest grant expires on September 30<sup>th</sup>. She stated that transferring funds from dislocated workers into adults will help with spending down those funds as well and lessens some of the concerns Erin and Sara have. However, with the significant number of people enrolled for Quest this last quarter it looks promising that EMDC will meet that spending goal by the end date. She stated that ARPA funding will roll over as will Quest because we start a new program year on July 1<sup>st</sup>. The board is already using our PY24 funds and will use those in the new program year as well as beginning to dip into our PY25 funds.

**VOTED:** To approve EMDC's request for transfer of funds.

**Motion:** Razell Ward

**Second:** Charlie Woodworth

**Vote:** All in Favor

### **4. Forest Industry Partnership-Erica Watson, MDF**

Erica Watson from the Maine Development Foundation gave a presentation and discussion around MDF, the presentation will be available via email to everyone. She explained that MDF supports industry partnerships for the forest opportunity roadmap for the forest product sector in Maine. MDF is a nonpartisan statewide driver of sustainable economic growth created in 1977, and they provide several different services like the measures of growth report which gives different indicators of prosperity and health within Maine for over 30 years. They also have a leadership program which includes Leadership Maine and the Institute for Civic Leadership, and their programs and partnerships like the Maine Downtown Center or For Maine.

Erica presented more detailed information on For Maine and the Forest Opportunity Roadmap for the board. She explained that when Maine saw multiple mill closures industry and other partners got together to discuss how we were going to envision the next phase and next steps in

the forest product sector. They began working with the US Department of Commerce and the EDA (Economic Development Administration) and formulated what is not called Forming. Within the first 3 years they did mostly data gathering to say, "what is the state of forest product sectors?", global market analysis and worked with hundreds of stakeholders across Maine to review different emerging technologies in the R&D and research happening within the universities and businesses. They also did transportation studies and different analysis of what energy would be used for supply and came out with data that helped what is referred to as the roadmap, which shows how do we grow and diversify the forest product sector and the goal on growth by 40% by 2025. Essentially taking a \$8.5 billion dollar industry and growing it into a \$12 billion dollar industry through phases. Within the first phase there was no mention of the workforce, but while putting together the roadmap and reviewing it it was decided that this needed to be a focus of phase 2. Fortunately, the EDA provided a large portion of funding that was focused on community and workforce development that asked what was needed now and what will be needed in the future to meet goals. In this phase the Workforce Development Strategy report was created in partnership with USM that allowed MDF to put together strategies for forming and helped inform people of grant opportunities and what they would undertake in support of the forest product sector workforce. One of the things the report showed was that there was a need for greater education and outreach to raise awareness around the opportunities within the sector for those people who help not only youth but adults and students as well. It was also important to get the message to advisors, teachers, parents and anyone else who help to shape and advise people considering career options. The other focus was on rural Maine communities and increasing a sense of placemaking to help keep youth within their communities and understanding what is available to them within those communities.

When the industry opportunity sponsored by MDOL and the State Workforce Board became available, Erica and the Workforce Committee for For Maine had to make a case for why it is they should apply especially where they tie back to the workforce strategies. She explained that industry partnerships are groups of employers, trade associations that include labor unions, training providers, educational institutions, community organizations, and other entities engaged in workforce development activities. An industry partnership can be helpful to help industry, education and others that may be effective to align an advanced career pathways in three different ways by more effective communication with employer needs, advance different sector strategies by creating those education and career pathways, and making those pathways accessible to potential employees at any age. The formal name is Transforming "Maine's Future Forest Workforce: Seamless Pathways" was awarded in November 2022 and will end in fall 2026 and was for \$665,000.

The initial grant strategies were straightforward and MDF was looking to create 7-10 career and education pathways for the most highly needed positions with the industry through continued communication on what they see are the most needed positions. They provide training through MCCS, UMaine and adult education while assessing and addressing barriers to entry and completion through the pathways for the underserved populations. They utilized the current workforce development infrastructure to enhance and build their effort to recruit, engage and

develop for placing people in careers. They also engage with human resource employees to develop and share practices promoting diversity, equity and inclusion to improve hiring and retention.

The anticipated outcomes were to have 7-10 specific career and education pathways developed, improve recruitment and retention by participating employers, have 180+ new or aspiring and current employees receiving training or education opportunities, including access to stipends for 80 students, and provide professional development opportunities as identified. They worked with Kamoine and Associates that resulted in not only the career and education pathways, but also the “Transforming Maine’s Future Forest Workforce” report. They engaged with 139 stakeholders in-person, virtually and within one-on-one and group focus groups, they worked with high school students who were part of the rural aspirations collaborative program and were able to get some great takeaways. One thing that was stated was the stress around talent attraction and the misinformation that is given to youth particularly leading people to think there is no future within the industry. There was also a lack of knowledge outside of traditional logging and papermaking around opportunities resulting in emerging technologies and research and development that’s happening across Maine. Results from a survey conducted with high schoolers showed that 94% knew little about the industry, and these were students who live in rural areas that have been impacted or closely impacted by either mill closures or are surrounded by the forest product industry. This also led them to create education and career pathways with plans to work with MDOL on their development of WorkSource Maine and highlight these pathways and get the word out with statewide partners.

One of the strategies was to create training programs like the business of Maine’s forest products sector course, working with new ventures Maine forestry workshop for adults and the trades for ME workshop for youth which has brought in hundreds of students so far. The recruitment, retention, and community workshop series has been great, and some of the future training courses include the CDL-cert A classes or forest products sector micro-credential training. The business of Maine’s forest products sector course created with the Sunrise County Economic Council and WCCC promotes workforce opportunities and innovation across Maine to 86 participants earning either 3 full credits or any of the four different micro-credential courses.

Erica mentioned a few other things MDF was able to do like secure an additional \$684,000 to directly support some grants, support part of the tech hub directly impacted by the \$22M EDA award to Maine, support the NSF Engine application for up to \$160M, support the eRISE award that was awarded to UMaine for \$4M and has a workforce component, and they are also supporting an EDA application to work with communities impacted by closures of biomass facilities for \$2.8M

Erin asked Erica if Spruce Mountain CDL-A already money must pay for that course because she would encourage her to reach out for anyone who may be WIOA eligible for payment or support services around that. She also asked about the NSF grant as it must be different from the one, she is familiar with, Erica agreed and stated that it is the same competition which was due in February with the space application and the forest product sector application needing to be

submitted. They had to pause and are now asking people to re-apply for those again this month. This is a nationwide competition with 7-10 awards being given.

Sarah asked about partnerships with high schools, in the case of TimberHP, they are fortunate that the high schools reach out to them for the STEM programs and presentations or opportunities to tell the students about products and recruitment and does she find the schools doing the same or is it a challenge? Erica said she feels that there has been improvement with schools not pushing the four-year college so much and giving attention to a broad range of opportunities like training and trade programs. She stated that she is currently working on a partnership with the Northern Forest Center and Rural Aspirations to go to 5 schools in greater Millinocket to hire an extended learning opportunity staff within those schools and can work one-on-one with local employers and various opportunities. Working in schools across Maine will assist with debunking some of the myths around stability and opportunity within the sector as well. Another program Erica mentioned is Maine Spark which helped to kick off the development of Maine's education attainment rate, which has a goal of 60% of Mainers with a credential of value by 2025. Maine is currently at 56.6% and for the first time in 5-6 years those credentials include shorter term credentials, which break away from the expectation of a bachelor's degree and higher. Excepting shorter term credentials assists families with sustaining wages and makes up about 11% of the credentials held by Mainers.

#### **5. Youth Committee/Fuseideas Updates-Erin Benson**

Erin reviewed the final stats for the ARPA State Grant of \$500,000 that was partially spent on the Youth Marketing Campaign that has wrapped up recently. \$90,000 was set aside and an RFP sent out for a marketing firm to assist with this venture, after consideration Fuseideas was selected to run a campaign that had the goal of reaching disconnected youth, which according to the American Community Survey are youth between 16-19 years of age that are not in school. They may have completed high school or dropped out, and they are not working. There is a larger population of these youth in our 5-county region with over 600-900 total. Fuseideas did creative concepts and a landing page [mymainefuture.org](http://mymainefuture.org), purchased and delivered analytics, focused on social media, digital display ads on websites that youth frequent. They did search engine marketing so that when someone searched for jobs or other key words our ad would pop up, and they held focus groups. and held focus groups all with the goal of enrolling 75 youth through the campaigns end. They planned to place YouTube ads and have testimony from participants on the landing page, but finding youth to participate in the videos was nearly impossible so that fell through. Part of the ads that ran were selected by youth via the focus groups, which again were nearly impossible to hold. A well-known Maine company was hired with a \$6,000 budget to hold 5 in-person focus groups within each county we serve. However, despite their attempts with outreach via phone calls, social media, letters, etc. there was no response from youth 16-24 which was the focus of the campaign. We did not have to give them the \$6,000 as they were unable to fulfill their obligations, and the focus groups in the end were held via two ZOOM meetings with a very small number of youths in attendance, but it also became very clear just how hard it was going to be to reach these young people. Erin was able to show everyone the final ads from each area including the landing page for the website.

The final report from Fuseideas, which she will send along to everyone once she has their final report. There were some things that needed to be fixed once their meeting with her yesterday was complete. The first spike in activity was in November right after the social media began. Prior to mid-February when the YouTube videos went up there was no activity from young men 18-14, which was why getting the YouTube ads up was so critical because young men are on YouTube. Part of the impressions we were looking for came from anyone who clicked on an ad or a link, then there were those who went into the landing page and those who went there and filled out a form and submitted it. These showed us the engagement, which we could see increased when things like radio ads or media began to run in mid-February. We were able to use the extra \$6,000 we saved from the focus groups, and the \$500 from Google for being new customers and roll those funds into running the campaign through to the end of March. In the end the campaign delivered 11,323,161 impressions, which can be one person looking at it 11 million times or 11 million different people looking at it once, the chances are it's somewhere in the middle. The cost per thousand impression was \$3.19, which according to industry standards is extremely efficient, and the cost per click was \$.63 per impression. The search engine marketing overdelivered industry benchmarks by 242% and was 5 times more efficient. There were 32,000 distinct visitors to the landing page and over 40,275 active sessions, this means that the person stayed on that site for longer than 5 seconds. Part of the problem with the landing page is that it was designed to point people to the form, but without the testimonial videos there was nothing for anyone to click on to keep them engaged, so we did end up adding a direct link to EMDC's workforce development area. Google Display and Paid Social drove most of the clicks with 26,771, Paid Search drove most conversions with 13.43%, these were the people who filled something out. 70% of the impressions we saw came from mobile devices and the greatest activity came from women 18-254 and men 24-34. Facebook and Instagram reached parents quite heavily and we did take steps to reach a younger male audience, but most youth is on TikTok and due to laws, we were unable to utilize that platform. Radio stations played a PSA at no charge and ran 656 spots that delivered 701,000 impressions which valued at \$13,800 and added 40% to the value of the campaign.

Overall, we received 609 submission forms from the 5 counties, 71 came from other counties and were forwarded to them, 13 came from the Northeast and were also sent their way, 13 were from outside Maine and Carrie reached out to those individuals with the name and contact information for career centers in their area that they could reach out to. There were 308 forms submitted from youth 24 and younger, 6 youth were enrolled and 23 are in process, 21 declined services, 6 were not eligible and 252 were unresponsive. 290 forms came from people 25-54, 7 were enrolled, 9 are in process, 4 declined services and 270 have been unresponsive. 77 forms came from individuals 55+ with 1 enrolled, 4 in process, 3 declined services and 69 unresponsive. This gave us a total of 50 enrolled or in the process of enrolling for services from the campaign. During the campaign we worked with EMDC on the message they left or what they said when they reached someone as a lot of people didn't know who they were or were expecting someone from my Maine future to connect with them and not EMDC. So, we did have to work on that piece which helped with how many people responded when contacted, but connecting with these young people is still very hard. The landing page continues to be live and there are posters around local areas still up, some radio ads are still playing, so we may see

more activity in the future as well. Kelly stated that reaching youth in this age group is very tough and that the best response they see is via Instagram or Snapchat and that may be an area to investigate as well. She also asked where the posters are and stated that she would be interested in getting some that she could get out to her businesses and programs as well. Erin explained that WIOA funding was not allowed to be used for marketing, so with the narrow window and extra money that we had getting to do this campaign did benefit us greatly in exposure. She has asked EMDC to continue to reach out to everyone who responded through the campaign in the future who may be unresponsive right now, but we may get them active later as more word of the board and what we can do spreads from this coverage. She explained that we were reaching a lot of parents, and that she had a grandmother who reached out to us and through her efforts we were able to reach out to the youth who was unresponsive on her own.

#### 6. Executive Director's Report:

- **ARPA Update:** We had \$54,000 in the Quest grant that we added \$90,000 to for the Community Based Organizations mini grant. We hired CBOs in each of the 5 counties, Maine Immigration & Refugee Services in Androscoggin, Maine Re-Entry Network in Kennebec & Somerset, and Western Maine Community Action. By far Maine Immigration & Refugee has been the biggest benefit going from never referring anyone for services to referring 46 people thus far with 12 of those enrolled, which is 26% of the return and we know enrollment will go up moving forward. MERN was a critical partner in the Opioid grant, and they referred 31 people but no one enrolled. Erin has met with them and discussed how they can do better at referring and how we can do better working with the people they do refer to us. One thing we will do is keep someone from MERN involved in the process since these people develop a rapport with them and they're a known entity versus EMDC that they may not know. We have also been able to connect with staff from parole and pretrial as well as the drug courts and there is value there in working together. WMCA referred 19 people and 3 of those are enrolled, which is a 15% return. Erin stated that WMCA has done an amazing job with outreach, they put together flyers and met with community organizations to educate them on services. Erin reiterated that the \$500,000 was not from WIOA but was extra funds that was floating our way and gave us a great opportunity to do things that we hadn't done before.
- **Transportation Grant:** Erin stated that she was very interested earlier on when Leah mentioned transportation issues for businesses around us because none of them filled out the RFA for the transportation grant. The grant is \$210,000 that was set aside for transportation with the initial goal of renting minivans and having a van associated with an employee at a business that could pick up at least 3 other employees over the course of 14 months, serving 9 people and would cost about \$25,000. On March 4<sup>th</sup> emails were sent to chambers, economic development directors, AVCOG, KVCOG, MAME, AGC, MDOL, the CWMWDB Board, MDECD's Off of Business Development, BES. MDOL posted the release on its website and social media, a release was sent to all the media and business contacts they have as well on March 6<sup>th</sup>. Mid-Maine Chamber forwarded the release from MDOL to their membership on March 10<sup>th</sup> and AGC Maine shared it in their

newsletter. A press release appeared in the Central Maine.com news site on March 11<sup>th</sup> and Erin attended the LA Chamber B2B trade show on March 27<sup>th</sup> and shared the information while handing out copies of the grant. Applications were due on April 15<sup>th</sup>, and we received 6 applications, 3 from businesses and 3 from recovery houses. A committee including Josh, Diane, Charlie, Angelina and Erin will review the applications and decide on the grant awardee by next week and will also discuss how to fund these places and with how much money, if there is anything left over do we reach out with something like this again? Erin will inform everyone of the end results as they happen.

- **Local Plan:** Every 4 years we need to put forth an updated plan, this current plan expires on June 30, 2025. There are a few things Erin feels is important to have in the plan, one of them is the defense industry, shipbuilding/repair, and industrial-based suppliers. There will be a need for more than 4million people over the next 10 years to keep up with defense contracts, 240,000 will need to serve BIW and PNS. There are 246 defense industry companies in Maine that feed into the pipeline of BIW and PNS. Erin has asked for the list of who those 246 businesses are because she would like to see who among them are located within our 5-county region. Another focus needs to be on healthcare and social services, which is the largest sector in our region. We need to have one which includes industry sector partnerships like MDF and the forest product sector and oral health as well as hospitality and tourism, and the retail sector as well. Another area needs to include career pathways for immigrants and refugees with priority on lower-level position needs and ESL learning. Incumbent worker training needs to be in the plan which is also part of WIOA and allows us to pay for training for incumbent workers to raise their skill level and get them higher level positions. The law allows us to take 20% of adult and dislocated worker funds and use them for incumbent worker training which is not done often in Maine due to a lack of funding and is not done through the service provider who is more hands-off. Erin's idea is to take 5% of the dislocated worker funds and figure out how to use that with businesses directly for these sorts of training and pathways. Another piece of the plan is a focus on transitioning foster care children out of care into adulthood at 18 which is the cut off. In 2023 there were 2,401 children in state custody which was the highest number since 2004. The number of children in foster care has been increasing each year since 2017. Erin mentioned that YLAT has an annual transition day, which is a daylong conference which is coming up and they have already sent out proposals that we may be able to tag into with a table and information with EMDC. Carrie used ChatGPT and Microsoft CoPilot to summarize the commonalities of the six plans that should be reflected in our local plan: the Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029, the 2024 Reset Plan (both from the Governor's economic plan for the state), the Workforce Attraction and Recruitment Plan, the Maine Unified Workforce and Innovation Opportunity (WIOA) State Plan, KVCOG Comprehensive Economic Development and AVCOG Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies, and these will be reflected in our plan as well. Tom Fernands from EMDC runs reports on the data sets we need and a business and partnership questionnaire was sent to the Board in January and will be sent out to businesses in our regions and a one stop partners questionnaire was sent out last week so that a draft can be completed by the end of May. The USDL contracted with an organization called Saffel

that did training and provided technical assistance on turning a plan into an active one versus a shelf sitter, so Erin is going to use that for our local plan. Erin is looking for volunteers to proofread and review the plan the first week of June, Kelly stated that she is willing to help with that.

- **NAWB Conference:** Erin, Cathy and Laurie attended the annual NAWB conference and Advocacy Day in DC in March. Cathy stated that she found it very interesting and compared to the size of some workforce boards she felt like a small fish in a big pond, however it was interesting to see that despite that we are all dealing with similar concerns and issues. She said that she did take away hiring based off skills versus education-based hiring, and that many youth today are not feeling the importance of higher education like they were years ago and that has changed how hiring processes need to be handled. Putting more importance on training than education gave her a new energy and perspective moving forward. During the Advocacy Day everyone got a chance to have time with their representatives and Erin and Laurie were able to meet with Angus King and mention a few things and he had her talk with his staff. They also met with Susan Collin's staff, which is vital with her being the Chair of Appropriations, the staff was very engaged and asked some really good questions and took notes as well which is important since they are the ones doing all the research and getting it to the representatives and senators so they have a better chance to figure out how they want to vote. They also went to Jared Golden's office and spoke with his staff who was there for 3 months and didn't know much about WIOA, but he also took notes and was very attentive. Shelli Pingree staff was great about asking questions and getting back to us, she was also seasoned in the office and knew about WIOA and our concerns.
- **WIOA Reauthorization:** The concern remains around the WIOA Reauthorization and the decision back in March 2024 for the "Stronger Workforce for America" that requires 50% of funding to be used for training. This is problematic because, for example, community college is free for the first two years, they also got \$75 million from Alford to provide workforce development through their workforce development departments for short-term training and many of those will be free. A lot of hospitals are creating their own CAN programs to fill positions, and Maine spent a significant amount of money on apprenticeships, so requiring 50% for training means people who may need support for work gear, and such can no longer be assisted.
- **Impact Report:** The NAWB strongly suggests that we have a one- or two-page impact report. Erin sent samples of an impact report with data at the state level to say to what we need to get together to use for our congressional representatives but also the state representatives as well.
- **IFA:** The Infrastructure Funding Agreement has been signed, which means that the state was able to send out the invoice for rent, but we are trying to put together a committee to negotiate the new IFA since this one expires in June. One issue we face is the downsize that is happening at the Lewiston Career Center which affects the square footage and use of the information center and the formula for figuring out rent per resident and non-resident. We are hoping to sit down in May and work on this.
- **Virtual American Job Center:** The virtual job center is live, Erin encourages everyone to take a moment to check it out.

- **NSF Engine Grant:** We have a part of the NSF Engine Grant that's focus is on the Maine Space Consortium and small satellites. This is conversations and planning around the value chain that's been in process and the steps to get something from an idea to the production phase and then sold. The value chain for small satellites is between 21-42 months. The grant will focus on how to get that timeline down to under 12 months and is the only grant of the space-related NSF grants that deals with small satellites. It was put on hold and recently resubmitted so Erin will keep everyone informed.
- **July Meeting:** Mark McInerney from the Center for Workforce Research and Information has been asked to join us in July for our in-person meeting to give us an outline of what's going on economically in our region. Bobbi Avery will also give us a session on retail sectors across Maine.

#### **7. Other/New Business:**

In February something came from the federal government to freeze all federal funding and that stopped, however there have been different funding streams that have either been curtailed or eliminated since then. We got an email this morning from Ginny that stated out FPO, Federal Project Officer, informed us of significant reduction in staffing at the region office. Staff were offered an opportunity to leave their jobs, and it is our understanding that the Boston offices will be closed, and the remaining staff will be reinstated to Philadelphia. Erin doesn't know what this means for the WIOA reauthorization and that this is the first freeze that has hit close to home. She will continue to stay updated about everything and will reach out as updates come to her.

Kelly asked Erin what she needs from everyone on the board, examples she gave were volunteering for review of the grant applications or finding more applicants for the transportation grant, hanging my Maine future posters around, things that may be helpful. Erin said that she will share the posters and will reach out as things come to her that board members can assist with, but continuing to take every opportunity to spread the word about services and programs is the biggest help. Working together as partners is another way to help, Billi's company is now an official DOD Skill Bridge company which is an opportunity for transitioning and separating service members from active-duty military for up to 180 days to intern with industry, but industry cannot pay them as they are active and still receiving a paycheck, so assisting with travel, housing, etc. is important. Erin said the best thing to do is remember if there is anything to do with workforce happening in your area or industry, reach out to see how we can make an impact of any kind.

#### **8. Adjourn Meeting:**

Cathy adjourned the meeting at 10:40 am.

**Next Board Meeting Date: Thursday, July 24, 2025, in-person event, location TBD**