

THE WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS GROUP

EMPath (Economic Mobility Pathways)
Massachusetts AFL-CIO
Massachusetts Business Roundtable

Massachusetts Communities Action Network
Massachusetts Workforce Association
SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce

April 21, 2020

Senate President Karen Spilka
Speaker Robert DeLeo
Chairman Michael Rodrigues
Chairman Aaron Michlewitz

Dear Senate and House leaders:

Responding to a catastrophic global pandemic, Massachusetts, along with states across the nation and countries around the world, took the unprecedented steps of shutting down large portions of our economy and issuing stay-at-home orders in an attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19. It was a bold step that will help save lives but will have a significant and unknown impact on the economy. We will all need to work together over the next 6-18 months to rebuild some sense of normalcy, public health and safety, and a working economy.

The closure of businesses in almost every sector of the economy has led to an unprecedented number of unemployment claims all happening in a matter of days. People are struggling to meet basic needs such as food, shelter and utilities. The immediate impact on the economy far outpaces the lowest point of the Great Recession and requires federal, state, and local governments to provide immediate support to citizens, especially those disproportionately impacted by this pandemic.

We commend the Legislature and Administration for acting quickly to respond to multiple needs on multiple fronts. The Commonwealth's quick action will help many residents connect with desperately needed resources for food, stable housing, and unemployment benefits. As you continue to develop the Commonwealth's response to this crisis, we want to share some principles to help guide these priorities.

Invest in the workforce system:

- Continue to ensure the UI system has the resources, the trained personnel, and capacity to operate remotely and service increased needs. While we understand DUA is expanding and trying to keep up with the unprecedented volume of UI applications, those who lose their jobs during this pandemic cannot wait weeks for UI financial assistance or a call to respond to questions. We urge the Administration to keep addressing the UI help backlog and get people assistance in a timely manner. We also want to thank Secretary Acosta and the team at DUA for the recent launch of the Spanish UI application and we urge the administration to continue to make applications, information, and call support available in multiple languages.
- Increased funding at MassHire Career Centers, recognizing their role on the frontlines of this crisis. Career centers and the MassHire workforce system have been chronically underfunded

as federal investment in the public workforce system has declined. State investment, particularly at the beginning before the federal formula funding catches up and/or Congress increases its investment in the public workforce system, will be critical to responding adequately and quickly to emerging business and job seeker needs in this new virtual climate. Additionally, while DUA bears the responsibility for the UI system, career centers are often the first place individuals go when they become unemployed. They contact their local career center for assistance with their UI claims, short- and long-term job search, and connections to other public resources to support them and families while they are out of work. We will continue to push at the federal level to ensure increased investment in WIOA, which will ensure more federal workforce training dollars flow to Massachusetts.

- Maximum spending flexibility for state workforce related line items so that important programs don't lose critical funds because training programs are currently on hold. Many partnerships were forced to cease operations due to the pandemic, it is important to ensure that grantees don't have to remit unspent funds at the end of the fiscal year.
 - Training Resources and Internship Networks (TRAIN) Grant Program- 7066-0015
 - EOHD Advanced Manufacturing line item (7002-0020)
 - Youth Adults with Disabilities Program (7003-0607)
 - Re-Entry Workforce Demonstration Project (7003-0150)
 - Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (4000-0005)
 - Gang Prevention Grant Program,Shannon Grants (8100-0111)
 - Secure Jobs Connect (4400-1020)
- Fund training and mental health support for those who lose their jobs and will be dealing with extremely pressing needs.
- Invest in upskilling and retraining programs; hundreds of dislocated workers will need to switch careers and retrain for jobs in sectors that are hiring.
- Increase investment in ESOL as a rapid re-employment strategy. Many people disproportionately impacted have ELL needs.

Thankfully, the state has invested in building out workforce partnerships across the state in multiple sectors, and has an administrative system through EOLWD/Commonwealth Corporation with a proven track record. The state's Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund is well equipped to respond quickly to regional labor market needs as funding becomes available.

Support other critical areas of the economy:

- Increase state investment in building out broadband and other technologies to help people work remotely, and connect rural areas and low income communities with Wi-Fi and other 21st century infrastructure needs. Adequate broadband infrastructure throughout the state is necessary so that our public workforce system, local government, businesses, and workers can operate effectively remotely. Investing in broadband technology across the state will also help make remote learning and training available to all residents/students.
- Guide federal investments in infrastructure; such as roads, bridges, railway and broadband. Transportation improvements will be needed to help people access jobs across the state. Prioritize helping people safely get to work.
- Ensure the health and safety of every worker with PPE available as needed.
- Develop consistent health and safety standards across all essential workforces.

Our communities and networks stand ready to work with you to support the health of the people of our Commonwealth and to do our part to restart our economy.

We thank you for your continued leadership.

Sincerely,



Chris Kealey, Deputy Director
Mass Business Roundtable



Lew Finer, Director
Mass Communities Action Network



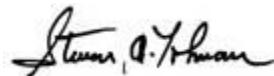
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