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## Creating A Unified Workforce System At the Local Level:

### A Primer for Getting Involved With the Planning Process for Integrated Services at the One-Stop Career Centers

#### Introduction

Over the next nine months, local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBS) will be developing plans to implement the statewide consolidation of all of the “to work” activities of the Departments of Human Services and Education with the Department of Labor. There is a lot of opportunity for local organizations and individuals to get involved but one must be pro-active and seize the opportunity.

#### Background

For the past year, there has been serious discussion and planning for the reorganization of the delivery of employment-related services to welfare recipients and some people receiving services within the Department of Education. Although the Governor has yet to sign the executive order finalizing the plan, the Departments of Labor, Human Services and Education are moving forward and preparing for full implementation of the changes on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004 with some phase-in prior to that.

Although committees and work-groups continue to meet at the state level, guidelines have already been issued so that local plans can be developed. Plans are being developed primarily by the WIBs which oversees One-Stop Career Centers throughout the State<sup>1</sup>. As different geographical areas throughout the State present unique needs and circumstances, the local areas are being given a lot of flexibility to develop plans to meet their clients’ needs. The WIB Directors and/or Chairs were supposed to submit lists of required “advisory committee members” to the SETC by August 15<sup>th</sup>. Included on this list are regional legal services program representative; county mental health association representative; local office serving the disabilities community or their representative; community and faith-based agencies; and, customer of the welfare system. All of these people are stake-holders and the SETC is requiring some involvement by at least one person representing each of these interests and perspectives. Key staff members at the SETC are: Henry Plotkin and Dave Novak. The phone number is: (609) 633- 0605

<sup>1</sup> New Jersey has 18 WIBS, generally one per county with several notable exceptions. There is one WIB for the following counties: Atlantic/ Cape May; Salem/Cumberland; Hunterdon/Somerset; and, Morris/Sussex/Warren counties. In addition Newark has its own WIB as distinct from the rest of Essex County and Jersey City has its own as distinct from the rest of Hudson County. Information about WIBS can be found at the State Employment and Training Commission web site at: <http://www.njsetc.net/>

### **Why is this Important?**

There is an opportunity for real and meaningful training and employment opportunities for WFNJ participants. However, there are significant concerns that many of the issues that WFNJ participants face will not be addressed by the new consolidated system.

### **What to Advocate For:**

- 1) How will a case be handled initially? What happens if an applicant goes to the OSCS instead of the CWA? What assessment will take place prior to any referral to the One Stop? How/ when will an individual be assessed for deferral? How/when will a review of social needs takes place? How/when will a determination of “job ready” be made? Will the IRP be coordinated with social service needs, EA service plan, possible DYFS plan and other plans?

**The client flow must specifically address what happens with a client from initial walk-in for application through the assignment to a work activity.**

- 2) How will a WFNJ participant’s case be evaluated on an ongoing basis? What happens to a client when circumstances change and different support services or different work hours or a deferral are needed?

**The system must remain flexible and open to accommodate the likelihood that a client’s needs will change and evolve.**

- 3) Who will arrange support services initially? Who will arrange them after circumstances change? Who will resolve problems if services aren’t working?

**There must be clear accountability of workers while allowing case managers at both the one-stop and the CWA to intervene to resolve a client’s problems. Clients can not be “bounced” around.**

- 4) What happens with sanctions? What kind of outreach will be done prior to notice of intent to sanction? Who will client contact for conciliation and who will be involved in the process? Since a good cause determination involves both work related and non-work related issues, will workers from both the CWA and the OSCS review for good cause? How/ when will sanctions be implemented/ rescinded/ lifted?

**There must be assurances that sanctions will only be imposed where appropriate and that access to fair hearings and conciliation are clear.**

- 5) What types of activities will be available to clients? Will accommodations for disability and limited English proficiency be in place?

**All issues related to disability must be recognized and addressed in the plan.**

- 6) Will this entire process be adequately explained to all participants, both orally and in writing?

**There must be sufficient training and development of materials for all workers.**

- 7) Who will an individual contact if there is a problem with their case? If more than one person, will the differences be explained to the participant both orally and in writing?

**The plan must thoroughly address communication among all workers involved and accountability.**

8) What about substance abuse or mental health referrals?

**Both CWA workers and 1-stop workers should be able to refer clients to the Substance Abuse Initiative and be able to refer clients for additional services. However, addressing social service needs should remain the responsibility of the CWA**

**How to Get Involved:**

There is no process in place by the SETC to assure that all members of the advisory group have been involved with the development of the plan. However, the SETC has made it very clear that the planning is supposed to be an open process involving input from a broad spectrum of individuals and organizations.

If you are part of a group that is identified as being a mandated advisory group member then it is imperative that you contact your WIB chair or WIB director to get information and demand that you be involved in upcoming meetings. If you feel that you are not welcomed into this process, then contact the SETC and let them know. It would be useful to put any requests in writing.

If you or your group is not identified as being a mandated advisory group member, there are still opportunities to be involved. It would be important to articulate any concerns that you have about the process in writing and send them to the WIB chair, WIB director and others who are involved in the process and copy them to Henry Plotkin and David Novak at the SETC. In addition, there are supposed to be scheduled public hearing during the month of December. Prepare testimony for the hearing and assure that other people that share your concerns are there as well.

Please let Maura Sanders or Heidi Gold at Legal Services of New Jersey know about your experiences with this process. The phone number is: (732) 572-9100 or by email to: [msanders@lsnj.org](mailto:msanders@lsnj.org) or [hgold@lsnj.org](mailto:hgold@lsnj.org)