Commission To Develop Strategies To Increase Postsecondary Access, Retention and Completion for Low-wage, Low-skilled Adults

Meeting Summary – September 18, 2007

Members Present: Sen. Dana Dow, Rep. Jayne Crosby Giles, Christine Hastedt, Rep. Dawn Hill, Judy Katzel, Karen Hadley Keim, Sen. Elizabeth Mitchell, Rep. Patricia Sutherland, Sarah Standiford

Others Present: John Dorrer, Department of Labor; Barbara VanBurgel, Department of Health & Human Services; Judith Pelletier, Department of Labor; Larinda Meade, Maine College Transition Program; Phillip McCarthy, OPLA Staff; Lucia Nixon, OPLA Staff; Clifford Ginn, Opportunity Maine; Henry Bourgeois, Compact for Higher Education; Charlotte Warren

1. Convening of the Commission.

Rep. Hill, House Chair of the Commission, convened the Commission and called the meeting to order. Commission Members introduced themselves. Commission Staff reviewed the purpose, duties and other provisions of Senate Paper 717, the Joint Order that established the Commission.

Rep. Giles asked if there was any legislative history on this policy topic, including recent reports or studies on this issue that could be sent to members.

Ms. Katzel asked if there were specific definitions of low-skilled and low-wage workers.

2. Conceptualization of the Policy Problem.

The Commission was presented with background information related to the low-wage, low-skilled adult workforce population and the barriers to postsecondary access, retention and completion for this segment of the workforce.

A. John Dorrer, Director of Labor Market Information Services, Department of Labor. Mr. Dorrer made a PowerPoint presentation titled "Maine Employment and Workforce Dynamics: Trends and Developments Shaping the Future." The following remarks were selected from this presentation:

- Current labor market in Maine, despite facing a shifting economy, has low unemployment rate;
- Slow job growth came to a halt in 2005, but slow, steady growth has returned, although there are regional disparities in job growth and "spot skills mismatch" (i.e., disconnect between skills and jobs);
- Labor force growth increased by 25% between 1950s to 19980s, but slowed precipitously in 1990s;
- Since 2000, foreign-born portion of Maine workforce has increased by 6,682 (with 3,070 since 2005);
- Southern Maine has net in-migration of workers; and northern has net out-migration of workers;
- Rapid rise in female labor force population is over;
- Labor force growth rate is expected to rise slightly through 2012 despite the fact that the labor force population is aging; the labor force participation rates are declining with age (after 50); and the 35-44 cohort ("baby bust") is declining;
- Maine has fewer workers available in the Transportation/Equipment/Manufacturing industry sector and the Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing industry sector;
- Occupational employment trends, or the "demand side," are characterized by the fact that blue-collar jobs are steadily declining (1950 – 2002);
- Educational attainment rising, but the majority of Mainers has less than a bachelors degree;
- Maine economy needs more people with higher educational attainment levels where there is expected to be job growth potential in Managerial/Professional/Technical jobs and in service occupations;
- Maine has 53 establishments with 500+ employees;
- Maine Chamber of Commerce 2004 survey found 58% companies planned to hire new employees, and 53% have difficulty finding qualified workers;

- Department of Labor/University of Maine ("UM") out migration study (1994) found that: of 1,500 students who entered UM in 1994, 827 were still working in the state 10 years later;
- Risk factors identified in the emerging labor force (Maine Kids Count 2004) found that 18% of the 18-24 cohort were "disconnected" in 2002 (i.e., not in school, not working and have no postsecondary education);

Discussion among Commission members centered on the need to address the "disconnected" 18-24 year olds who live in poverty, in some cases in families where their parent(s) do not have full-time, year round employment.

Rep. Sutherland noted that Maine Community College System tracks graduates every 5 years and finds that low pay in many parts of the State is an obstacle to retaining MCCS graduates in the state.

Ms. Katzel asked how Maine compares to other states in the proportion of university graduates who migrate out of state.

Rep. Giles would like more details on the difficulty finding qualified workers.

B. Barbara VanBurgel, Director, Office of Integrated Access and Support, Department of Health & Human Services. Ms. VanBurgel made a PowerPoint presentation titled "Postsecondary Education Access" and described the benefits of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families ("TANF") program and the Parents as Scholars ("PaS") program for eligible families. The following observations were selected from this presentation:

- Maine established PaS program following the federal governments enactment of TANF in 1996;
- PaS programs serve an average of 900 Mainers per year, including 1,100 this past year at the start of the academic year; there is a state cap of 2,000 program participants;
- TANF has a mandatory Education and Training (E + T) requirement for parents whose youngest child is 2 years old;
- PaS program does not require participants to work during their 1st two years enrolled as full-time college students;
- Eligibility for TANF benefits is limited to 60 months, except that each state can have 20% of its eligible population receiving benefits beyond 60 months; Maine has never reached 20% limit in the 12 years the program has been in place;
- PAS program participants have an 87% retention rate.

Discussion among and questions from Commission members addressed the following aspects of TANF and PaS program requirements and outcomes.

Rep. Hill requested clarification of the recent federal policy changes in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2006 regarding post-secondary education above an associate degree.

Rep. Giles requested data on the number of PaS participants that are employed following the program.

Rep. Hill asked what else could be done to help PaS participants from dropping out of the program. Ms. VanBurgel responded that greater flexibility in recognizing family needs, including allowance for breaks from school and allowance for a more flexible schedule; she also noted that PaS participants are more successful when people start slower -- 2-3 courses to start rather than full load.

Rep. Giles asked if PaS used PaS graduates to counsel or mentor programs participants. Ms. VanBurgel replied that PaS graduates work full-time and have family obligations that prevent them from mentoring; and she indicated that PaS relies on great cooperation from colleges, which often have centers for non-traditional students which serve PaS participants.

Ms. Keim suggested that PaS develop an "incentive program" or provision to increase the length of time for participants to pursue education for higher-paying positions where college programs take more time than the PaS program allows. Ms. VanBurgel responded that PaS doesn't have a time limit for cutting off participation; and noted that Maine statutes could be amended to clarify this matter.

3. Information Gathering: Existing Programs, Resources and Initiatives.

The Commission was presented with information related to existing programs that seek to serve the low-wage, low-skilled adult workforce population.

A. Judy Pelletier, Program Coordinator, Trade & Rapid Response, Department of Labor. Ms. Pelletier shared program description information regarding the following Maine Department of Labor ("MDOL") programs: (1) The newly-created "Competitive Skills Scholarship Fund"; (2) "One-Stop Career Centers"; (3) The Trade Adjustment Assistance ("TAA") and Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance ("ATAA") Services and Benefits; (4) Workforce Investment Act ("WIA") Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs; (5) The Governor's Training Initiative; (6) Maine's Apprenticeship Program; and (7) Maine's Lifelong Learning Accounts.

Discussion among and questions from Commission members addressed the following aspects of MDOL program requirements and outcomes.

TAA programs have served just over a 1,000 participants, who are dislocated workers and tend not to be TANF eligible. Participation in TAA programs can be up to 104 weeks in classroom training, including additional weeks for remedial training, for a maximum of 2 ½ years.

There have been reductions in funding in recent years, but the impact varies by county as the level of funding depends on the unemployment rate in the county.

Ms. Standiford would like to see data on participation in Governor's Training Initiative, including demographic data on the numbers of male and female participants.

Rep. Giles would like to see more information on what is accomplished through the Governor's Training Initiative.

Sen. Mitchell would like to see program benchmarks and data on program outcomes.

B. Larinda Meade, Project Coordinator, Maine College Transition Program. Ms. Meade provided an overview of the Maine College Transition Program, including a timeline of programs and initiatives that pre-dated and led to the Maine College Transition Program, as well as a listing of the 22 programs across the state and their fiscal agents.

Discussion among Commission members centered on the role of the of Adult Education program network with other agencies across the state that serve the low-wage, low-skilled adult population.

Ms. Meade indicated that the Adult Education programs have developed partnerships with the Department of Education, the Maine Community College System, the Department of Health & Human Services and the Parents As Scholars program, the Maine Compact for Higher Education, and the MELMAC Education Foundation

Sen. Mitchell and Rep. Giles asked about the stigma of adult education program for some of our younger adults and how the Maine College Transition Program dealt with this issue. Ms. Meade noted that locating the programs on a college campus helps and that using terminology, such as "college prep" instead of "remedial" seems to be helpful.

Sen. Mitchell wanted to know if discussions have taken place with the community colleges and universities about offering your programs on campus. Ms. Meade indicated that 3 programs are already located at community colleges.

Rep. Hill asked about how the Maine College Transition Program gets the word out to adults who could benefit from the program. Ms. Meade replied that each program distributes its own information; and also noted that a broader marketing effort is under development.

C. Karen Hadley Keim, Associate Director, Maine Educational Opportunity Center. Ms. Keim presented an overview of the federally-funded Maine Educational Opportunity Centers ("MEOC"), including the "TRiO in Maine Yearbook 06-07" and a 7-minute videotape titled "Getting Through the Barriers: The Support You Need to Succeed in College." The following remarks were selected from this presentation:

- Federally-funded MEOCs have been around since 1991; and Maine has 10 MEOC programs;
- MEOCs mission is to help adults identify and get through barriers; "common thread" is that students are in a hurry – lost job, spouse, and health;
- Work with adults to develop an individual education plan; build academic skills through tutoring by pairing students with Adult Education and MCCS for English and math, respectively; provide career counseling to all students;
- MEOC is also a tour guide in foreign place – help adults to navigate social barriers in college;
- MEOC funds can be used to pay application fee for SAT/TOEFL exams;
- Serve 3,000 students; MEOC counselor caseload is 400+; find that when counselors have 300 or less students, then college placement rates go up;
- Only 1% of the adult population that could benefit from this program is served, due to staff workload and resource capacity;
- Placed 631 students in college last year and only 3 left Maine;
- Also provide loan default counseling; we know-how to get people out of default;
- Have partnerships with 900 agencies across state, including Adult Education programs, MDOL Career Centers, and Women, Work & Community;
- Barriers are social and economic; our clients say money is the biggest barrier, but I would argue that while money is a big challenge it is the "life" issues that are the largest barriers; we are "educational access counselors" who provide support systems.

4. Prioritizing Key Policy Issues & Developing a Work Plan.

Commission members discussed their perspectives on the key policy issues and their expected outcomes of the study. In formulating the work plan, Commission members made the following requests for further information, data and analysis that can help in examining these policy issues.

Rep. Sutherland is interested in how to reconnect "disconnected" Mainers; look at ways to put under-employed and unemployed low-skill adults into the workforce; would like to focus on 18-24 year old young adults who are "disconnected." Rep. Giles would also like to know if there are outreach efforts to reach "disconnected" these 18-24 year olds.

Ms. Katzel wants to hear from Maine Community College System ("MCCS") personnel who work directly with this population; want to hear how they work with the organizations we heard from today and how they interact and cooperate.

Rep. Sutherland would like to know if there is a significant geographic difference across the state in terms of positions that lack qualified workers; is there a geographic variation in unfilled jobs.

Rep. Giles would like to receive MCCS information on the number of jobs in Maine that go unfilled due to the lack of qualified workers; and would like to see data by occupation and industry – what are the jobs available? In what sectors of the economy do we need trained workers? Where do we

need to be training people? Rep.Hill suggests we also need to consider future workforce and employment training needs by sector.

Ms. Katzel would like to learn more about the University of Southern Maine model where workforce development and training programs deploy instructors who take time out of their job to train others through on-site training programs.

Ms. Standiford is concerned about number of low-wage workers, primarily women who patch together a number of low-skilled jobs and for whom taking the time to get to a program for further education is itself a barrier to access and completion; would like to explore interventions to help people get into the door of the programs that are available.

Ms. Standiford would like to see if Commission can invite national resources – specifically, Julie Strawn, the workforce director at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) – to provide a policy scan of what programs are working in other states.

Ms. Hastedt feels we are missing a picture of the gaps and holes of those low-wage, low-skilled people in need of support and resources to access programs.

Ms. Hastedt also suggests we need to learn more about the federal financial aid programs and the discretion or "professional judgment" that may be employed for this population; and how we can promote more consistent use of discretion for this population.

Ms. Keim recommends we ask a representative of the federal Department of Education to clarify "professional judgment" requirements, rather than a campus financial aid officer from a Maine college since each campus has their own institutional policies for financial aid and "professional judgment."

Ms. Keim also sees the need to consider pathways or conduits, for example, prior learning assessments, and how to promote consistency and streamlining across the state; and recommend we hear from Peaches Bass, Department of Labor, on the issue.

Sen. Mitchell recommended having the post-secondary institutions at the table; and also wants to see Finance Authority of Maine ("FAME") come to discuss resources available to address these needs. We also need to have some centralized resource; where people can go to access the pathways.

Sen. Mitchell noted that – from her work with OPEGA – State government needs to get a handle on the appropriate benchmarks for this policy area and see what data can help us to measure performance. She recommends that the Commission needs to make connections between "real jobs" and "real people" and must focus on barriers faced by people and make "connections" to overcome them.

Sen. Dow would like to see a summary of existing programs, including those we heard about today, regarding: budget, numbers served, location of centers where service is available, services provided, etc.

Rep. Sutherland agreed that the Commission needs to narrow its focus; and would like to learn how other states, (e.g., Florida), decided to locate all these programs and supports into the community colleges and used federal workforce development and training programs to develop "one-stop" centers.

Ms. Hastedt thinks that the MDOL has given some thought to the "community college" career center model, (e.g. Florida), and would like to talk with Commissioner Fortman about this model.

Ms. Keim would like to see New York and Vermont programs where the state matches federal dollars for successful program. She stated that we don't want to reinvent the wheel, but need to find good models, provide funding, and replicate them.

Ms. Keim wants to see some uniformity in transferring credits from college to college; portability is important for this population. She feels if we have a uniform system, standards and a conduit, we will see increases in postsecondary education attainment rates and a decrease in loan default rates.

Ms. Hastedt suggests that there may be an opportunity to bring greater consistency the to the administration of federal financial aid; need to see if there are support services and financial aid policies at our college campuses.

Rep. Hill wants to know if there is an umbrella or coordinating entity that can align these programs to see that needs are identified and resources used efficiently. The Commission also needs to learn about the roles of the State Jobs Council and the Governor's Workforce Development Cabinet and whether or not they can provide more coordination?

Ms. Hastedt sees the Career Centers as one approach; Career Centers were conceptualized to fill that role; the Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation has just evaluated California's one-stop career centers as a base for packaging resources and training. California has systematized across the state and made a science of the packaging function and we need to learn more about this effort.

Ms. Keim proposed that the Commission authorize surveying MEOC clients (MEOC has client data from 1991). Ms. Keim and Ms. Standiford will work with staff to design a survey.

Rep. Hill sees a need for a clearinghouse with a snapshot for where programs (state, federal, community) can be accessed; and where pathways connect people to programs and resources; the idea would be that the clearinghouse provides information/access to all the options.

Ms. Katzel believes one barrier is the inability to connect; we seem to have a fragmented "medical model" where client must bring records from primary care to specialists and figure out where to go. We need to figure out a clearinghouse to help these people navigate the system; would like to see client be able to go to one spot and find out what programs meet their needs.

Rep. Giles wants to dig deeper on what we have in place now for infrastructure and doesn't want to create another layer; let's reorganize the closet as there may be capacity available in current system.

Sen. Mitchell defined "umbrella" as a means to making access easier, removing barriers; perhaps we could morph careers centers with MCCS campuses to remove stigmas and provide pathways across all regions of the state. Pathways need to be easy to get to; current situation is like a very complicated maze; would like to see discussion of how to create a simple path.

Sen. Mitchell wants the Commission to focus on effective models at our next meeting. Recommends we invite Commissioner of Labor Fortman and MCCS President Fitzsimmons to next Commission meeting to explore the integration of career centers on the MCCS campuses

5. Adjournment.

The Commission meeting was adjourned at 2:13 p.m. Next meeting set for Friday, October 5th from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Staff will also send out an e-mail to Commission members ASAP to select the best date for meeting #3.

Respectfully submitted,

Phil McCarthy, Legislative Analyst
Lucia Nixon, Legislative Analyst