# **Maine Waiver Request**

# **Waiver of State and Local Youth Spending Flexibility for Program Years 2024 & 2025**

## **The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the State would like to waive:**

The State of Maine requests a waiver of Section 129(a)(4)(A) and 20 CFR 681.410 which require state and local areas to spend not less than 75 percent of youth funds to provide career and training services to out-of-school youth. Maine requests that the waiver be approved for two consecutive program years PY2024 and PY2025 to allow local areas to expend 50% on in-school-youth and 50% on out-of-school youth. This request is being made under the Secretary’s authority at WIOA Section 189(i)(3)(B) to waive certain requirements of WIOA Title I.

## **Actions the State has undertaken to remove State or local barriers:**

The State works closely with the local areas to identify and address barriers to serving youth and implement steps to ensure eligible youth have access to WIOA services, such as outreach campaigns directed at disconnected youth. WIOA staff recruit youth at high schools, youth centers, and other agencies that serve youth and their families. The previous waiver was instrumental in expanding partnerships with Maine high schools and community organizations serving marginalized youth to actively connect eligible high school students to paid work experience and pre- and registered apprenticeship programs.

Waiver approval for PY24 and PY25 will be critical to their ability to continue to support the goals outlined below and give service providers a greater level of comfort in developing and budgeting in-school youth service implementation plans. A two year approval will also provide additional time to realize positive outcomes of high school youth being served.

1. **Description of State Strategic Goals:**

Because Maine has an aging workforce and very low population growth, Maine’s key strategic goal is to increase labor force participation. The state is working with employers to connect them to untapped labor pools; this waiver will support engagement of working age youth, both in and out of school.

A key goal of the Maine Children’s Cabinet is for all Maine youth to enter adulthood healthy and connected to the workforce and/or education. To support this goal, the Cabinet launched the “Maine Career Exploration Project” in 2023, a collaboration between high schools, WIOA youth providers, vocational rehabilitation, and Jobs for Maine’s Graduates focused on engaging high school youth in career exploration and experiential learning opportunities. The project helped Maine high schools to implement Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs). ELOs involve students in career exploration activities, work experience and internships, company tours and job shadowing activities that upon successful completion result in high school credit toward graduation. Several high risk students participating in the project remained engaged in high school through to graduation. Approval of this waiver will support continued collaboration with Maine high schools for this purpose.

Another critical goal is to ensure the young labor force has access to work-based learning opportunities like registered apprenticeship. The Maine Apprenticeship Program launched numerous certified pre-apprenticeship programs in partnership with Maine high schools, the Associated General Contractors of Maine, the AFL-CIO and other sponsors of registered apprenticeship. Last year 70 WIOA in-school-youth participated in a pre-apprenticeship program that prepared them to enter registered apprenticeship or employment in the construction and building trades. This summer 25 Maine high schools will offer another round of pre-apprenticeships in partnership with apprenticeship sponsors.

***Maine Priorities That Will Be Supported by This Waiver:***

1. **Increase Maine’s labor force by engaging youth in career exploration and paid work experience**
2. **Increase successful entry into employment, registered apprenticeship, or post-secondary education**
3. **Increase the overall number of WIOA youth served per program year**
4. **Increase Maine High Schools’ awareness of WIOA services available to eligible students**
5. **Decrease the number of disconnected youths by connecting youth with paid work experience, pre-apprenticeship, and extended learning opportunities before they drop out or leave school.**
6. **Increase involvement of Maine employers, apprenticeship sponsors, schools, and workforce system partners in activities that ensure high school youth successfully transition to employment and/or advanced training.**

## **How This Waiver Complements USDOL Priorities**

Approval of this waiver will help meet the following USDOL priorities:

* Increased labor force participation and enhanced worker productivity
* Increase in the number of paid work experience opportunities for in-school youth
* Increased access to pre- and registered apprenticeship opportunities for young workers
* Improved response to employer workforce needs
1. **Quantifiable Projected Quantifiable Outcomes Resulting from implementation of this waiver:**

Projected quantifiable outcomes of this waiver include increased labor force participation of working age youth, an increase in the number of in-school youth participating in a paid work experience or pre-apprenticeship program, increase in number of in-school youth going on to unsubsidized employment and higher education. Other expected outcomes are an increase in the overall number of WIOA youth served, a decrease in the number of youths disconnecting after high school, increased involvement of Maine employers, registered apprenticeship sponsors, schools, and workforce system partners in activities that ensure high school youth successfully transition to employment**.**

**Outcomes of the PY23 waiver**:

The previous waiver promoted an increase in the overall number served, from **367** in PY22 **to** **507** so far in PY24.

Last year over **177** in-school youth participated in paid work experiences and **70** completed a pre-apprenticeship program.

Outcomes of high school age youth enrolled under this waiver exceeded most negotiated levels:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **PY** | **AGE** | **EQ2** | **EQ2** | **EQ4** | **EQ4** | **EQ2$** | **EQ2$** | **CRED** | **CRED** | **MSG** | **MSG** |
|  |  | Neg. | **Act.** | Neg. | **Act.** | Neg. | **Act.** | Neg. | **Act.** | Neg. | **Act.** |
| **PY22** | **14-18** | 67.6% | **69.6%** | 70.5% | **72.5%** | $4,000 | **$3,840** | 56.5% | **51.0%** | 50.0% | **56.0%** |
| **PY23** | **14-18** | 68.0% | **64.1%** | 71.0% | **75.8%** | $4,050 | **$5,314** | 57.4% | **57.8%** | 51.0% | **58.2%** |

*KEY: Act. = actual rate, CRED = credential attainment, EQ2 = employed second quarter after exit, EQ4 = employed fourth quarter after exit, EQ2$ = median earnings second quarter after exit, MSG = measurable skill gains, Neg. = State negotiated rate.*

## **Individuals, groups, or populations benefiting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver.**

Per the CCM Commission on At-Risk and Disconnected Youth, an estimated 119,000 young people in Maine, aged 14-26, have or are at-risk of disconnection from school or work. This waiver will help high school youth realize their aspirations by ensuring they are connected resources and opportunities before they leave school. The waiver will allow us to continue to serve youth with barriers to employment, including youth from low income families, youth with disabilities *(70% of WIOA youth served in PY24 identified as an individual with a disability*), homeless youth, youth with skill deficiencies, justice involved youth, single parents, and former foster youth.

Employers offering pre-and registered apprenticeships, on-the-job training, paid work experience, internships, and job shadows will benefit from expanded access to young workers who may not otherwise connect to the employment opportunities they offer.

## **How the state plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of measurable waiver outcome information.**

Youth program statistics are reviewed on a quarterly basis, to ensure planned enrollment numbers and negotiated performance measures are being met or are on track to being met. Similarly, quarterly financial reports are reviewed to ensure spending thresholds are met and spending caps are not exceeded. Local areas provide quarterly narrative reports that discuss how they are meeting enrollment and performance goals. The reports also discuss best practices, new partnerships and approaches, and identify issues that may require technical assistance. Maine DOL meets monthly with WIOA board staff and service provider staff to discuss progress, best practices and challenges and offer technical assistance as necessary.