

WDC EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE
SUMMARY AND COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS
September 2021

1. COVID Pandemic
 - a. Vaccine and other mandates
 - b. Insurance
 - i. Health care
 - ii. Unemployment
 - c. Economic impacts
 - d. Impacts on special groups (kupuna and people with disabilities)
2. “Affordable” and “Reasonable” housing
 - a. Loss of mid-career professionals
 - b. No reversal of brain-drain
 - c. Unable to attract talent to move to Hawaii
3. Recruitment and retention of employees
 - a. Limited pool of qualified applicants within the state
 - b. Retention of talented/skilled employees
 - c. Impacts across multiple industries (tourism, engineering, nonprofit, healthcare, etc.)
4. Opportunities for industry leaders to work together to address common issues
5. Training programs need to better align with employer needs

The ILWU Local 142 represents members across many different industries/sectors. Our concerns vary depending on where the member works. But generally speaking, Covid and the certain policies/rules implemented because of Covid are often the biggest concerns right now with most of our members.

And while the economy has improved significantly since the height of the pandemic, there are still roughly 35,000+ residents collecting unemployment insurance with many more likely underemployed or long-term unemployed and no longer part of the unemployment data.

The Delta variant has caused another slowdown, particularly in the service sector economy – mostly hotel and tourism. We have many members that work at hotels and due to the new restrictions and slowdown in travel we are seeing hotels hiring fewer workers back or temporality laying off workers again until economic conditions improve.

Below are some of our concerns including the brief description above:

1. Unemployment insurance. Most of the additional federal benefits have expired from ARPA or the CARES Act. Workers, if they qualify, are now only collecting state unemployment insurance with no additional federal benefits. This will be financially difficult for many of these workers, especially with another slowdown.

2. Vaccine Mandates. We strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated. As you might know, due to the political volatility that currently exists, some workers are reluctant or opposed to getting the vaccine. This does create some challenges.
3. Health insurance. Workers unemployed lose their health insurance. Some may qualify for Med-Quest while others may not. Ensuring people have adequate health insurance during a pandemic is a concern.
4. Ultimately, we are a tourism dependent economy – whether some people like it or not. We have not even begun to even scratch the surface of economic diversification and until a robust conversation and plan is implemented, we need to be figuring out how to make tourism work while living through a pandemic that could last a few more years.

My concern right now is IN ADDITION TO UPSKILLING which I consider #1 in importance and urgency, we must do something immediately about housing!!! And I am not talking just about affordable housing which of course is our greatest need, but also I am talking about reasonable housing! We are losing workforce in the \$75k + range like crazy, also due to housing! there is nothing affordable for mid-career professionals that meets their needs. We also cannot recruit talent to relocate to Hawaii because of high cost of housing and sheer lack of houses!

Hiring/Staffing

We continue to have a limited number of qualified candidates for positions throughout our nonprofit organization. This impacts our ability to respond to new opportunities in the food service, grounds maintenance, custodial, and human services industries.

Implementing and Following COVID-19 Mandates

Since there are Federal, State and County mandates related to COVID-19 vaccination and testing, we have received mixed messages on vaccination requirements for employees, program participants and visitors. Fragmented guidance causes confusion and challenges with implementing procedures to follow the various mandates.

Impacts of COVID-19 on People with Disabilities (https://www.nga.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SEED_Memo.pdf)

We are seeing an increase in the severity of the barriers to gaining and maintaining employment that people with disabilities face. These heightened barriers include: increased health concerns associated with COVID-19 due to the presence of underlying health conditions, difficulty dealing with uncertainty and changing circumstances for people with behavioral and mental health conditions, reliance on public transportation and fear of health risks while commuting, challenges utilizing telehealth and digital options (email, online applications, virtual meeting platforms etc.) We are concerned about how this will impact access and equity in the workforce for people with disabilities and other barriers to employment.

Pandemic impact on partnering State agency operations, State budget, and contract opportunities.

Our programs that support people with disabilities and kupuna are contracted by the State of Hawaii. Reductions in the State budget and challenges that our partnering agencies face during the pandemic may impact access to our programs and services in the future, which in turn may limit inclusion in employment, community activities, and food security.

- Opportunities for industry leaders to work together to solve common issues
 - Training programs that are aligned to employer needs
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We have no significant impacts in our hiring or recruiting processes. Along with most companies, our force posture is work from home for staff who are not deemed 'essential' by our government clients. We have been successful in working with our clients in managing expectations on our client delivery and have not seen a significant reduction of workforce, nor a significant reduction of applicants.

Our VP, Bob Lietzke was interviewed by Hawaii Business Magazine. You can read the interview, which is short, but full of detail here: <https://www.hawaiibusiness.com/covid-19-booz-allen-hamilton/>

- There appears to be some apprehension in applying for a job in the hotel industry because of recent business downturns. I am wondering how we can reassure the viability of the tourism industry?
 - We hear that people are avoiding jobs in tourism because of the inconsistent scheduling/job security. What can we do about this perception?
 - We don't have a lot of local candidates applying for management positions. Is it because they are collecting UI or other reasons? How do we attract more local candidates to tourism?
 - Local people appear to blame the tourist industry and our visitors for "bringing COVID" into our communities. Why isn't there more information shared about where the Covid cases are coming from to alleviate the divide between the community and our visitors.
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