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**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL'S  
EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**

Thursday, January 15, 2026

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

MINUTES

**Attendance**

**Board:**

Gina Anonuevo, Committee Chair

Cheryl Cross, Committee Vice Chair

Rona Fukumoto, Lanakila Pacific

Wanelle Kaneshiro, Workforce Development Branch, Hawaii Department of Education

Lea Dias, Administrator of the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Thomas Chock, Creative Industries Division, Department of Business, Economic Development,  
Tourism

Christopher Lum Lee, Oahu Workforce Development Board

Rosella Guardascione, Chair, County of Hawaii Workforce Development Board

Amber Akana, Workforce Development Board

**Guest Presenters:**

Deniece Thomas, Commissioner of Labor, Tennessee

Earl Kalani, American Job Center Hawaii, Workforce Engagement, Work Hawaii Division

Leiala Cook, Work Hawaii

**Guests/Attendees:**

Lisa Pereira, Oahu Workforce Development Board

Leiala Cook, Business Service Team, Work Hawaii

Keala Monaco, Director of Workforce Innovation, UH Community Colleges

Cassidy Patmount, Community Relations Specialist, American Job Center Hawaii

Vanessa Rogers, Vice President of Workforce Development, Chamber of Commerce Hawaii

Tamara Addison, Vice President of Human Resources and Labor Relations, Oahu Transit Services

Taimane Passi, One-stop Operator, American Job Center – Oahu Branch

Sarah Guay, Hawaii Employers Council and Oahu Workforce Development Board

Kalani Lum, Training Manager, Paratransit, Oahu Transit Services  
Erin Fernandez, WIOA Specialist, Oahu Workforce Development Board  
Sherrie Garedo, Oahu Workforce Development Board  
Letha DeCaires, EEO Officer, TheBus/Handy Van, Oahu Transit Services  
Su Lazo, Office of Economic Revitalization, City and County of Honolulu  
Michelle Kennedy, VP of Customer Services, TheBus/Handy Van, Oahu Transit Services  
Paul Chen, First Hawaiian Bank  
AJ Hoffman, Director of Human Resources, White Hoffman Co.  
Katrina Dawsey  
Kalani Lum, OTS/Paratransit

**STAFF:**

Bennette Misalucha - Executive Director, Workforce Development Council  
Jeanne Ohta – Employment Specialist, Workforce Development Council  
Margaret Miura – Program Specialist, Workforce Development Council

**LOCATION:**

Remote Meeting via Zoom & Physical Location: 830 Punchbowl Street, Room #317, Honolulu, HI 96813

**I. Call to Order [00:00:00 – 00:10:42]**

Chair Gina Anonuevo called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m.

**II. Minutes for the April 16, 2025, meeting [00:10:43 – 00:11:50]**

Motion to accept the Minutes was made by Council member Guardascione and seconded by Council member Cross. The motion passed without discussion and unopposed.

**III. Presentations**

**A. Tennessee Workforce Development Board [00:11:51 – 00:46:59]**

Deniece Thomas, Commissioner for Labor and Workforce Development, outlined Tennessee's comprehensive Employer Guide, TN WORKS, and how it came about.

- Initially had a very fractured employer engagement with multiple agencies calling on businesses and industry
- No real way to connect and align support to businesses and industry
- Partnered with KPMG to do a full-service assessment; Report showed employers were frustrated with the disjointed effort
- Assessment also done at the American Job Centers; Report showed service delivery was not where it needed to be

With the data, they started the concept called the TN Works Hub, a centralization and combination of multiple state agencies: TN Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Department of Education (K-12), Board of Regents which governs the technical and community colleges, Higher Education Commission (4-year institutions), Department of Economic and Community Development, Department of Human Services, and all front-end business and recruitment. The TN Works Hub also included the different Chambers of Commerce, local workforce development boards, state workforce development board, and other stakeholders.

Their goal was to improve employer and industry engagement to improve and provide navigation services to employers for everything from job recruitment, job creation, and developing talent pipelines. They want to be there for every part of the business development cycle: new businesses starting up, expansion, and when businesses close and cease operation.

### **Primary Work**

Key focus areas for employer and industry engagement:

- Navigation services to employers (i.e., job recruitment, job creation, talent pipeline, and retention)
- Tailor data-driven solutions to match a company's workforce plan
- Business development strategies

### **Supporting Activities**

Workforce strategy and insights relied on consolidating labor market data common among all the partners as the "single source of truth," monitoring the market for changing signals, and providing a statewide advisory on workforce policies, compliance, curriculum alignment, and funding sources.

### **Collaboration and Strategy Activation**

Commissioner Thomas presented an overview of the executive management and performance measures moving forward since the official launch in November of the TN Hub. The Executive Director of the Hub orchestrates and ensures the handoff. Regional business and workforce directors work with businesses and industry based on sector strategies to build relationships and update the rest of the group. From the public facing side of the Hub, it doesn't matter who meets their needs, the Hub is a unified system (labor, economic and community development, and education).

### **TN Hub Key Points**

- Labor market intelligence, people analyzing the data and trends for the labor force/market, is the engine inside the Hub.
- The funding for the Hub is a separate line item in the governor's budget and can draw on various types of funds and resources.
- No one agency gives up their identity
- All agencies share common branding and goals to serve business and industry
- Services are not compromised, rather they are shared. Agencies attached to the Hub have access to all the data.

### **TN Overarching Questions**

- What are we asking people to do?
- How will we measure success?
- How will we ensure and build this out? (Accenture, 3<sup>rd</sup> party group, helped)

### **B. American Job Center, Oahu [00:47:00 – 01:01:15]**

Earl Kalani and Leiala Cook shared how the business services are empowering employers, building the workforce, and clarifying the picture for the future. Slides were included in the committee packet.

#### **IV. Executive Director's Report [01:01:16 – 01:08:55]**

Presenter: Bennette Misalucha

- Unified plan, implementation
- Status of the modified state plan
- Quarter activities and events

#### **V. Employer Engagement Roles and Responsibilities [01:08:56 – 01:26:00]**

The mission of the Employer Engagement Committee is to strengthen partnerships with Hawaii's business community by aligning workforce programs with employer needs, improving access to talent, and supporting strategies that help employers hire, train, and retain a skilled workforce.

Executive Director Misalucha coordinated the discussion of the roles and responsibilities of the committee and direction to achieve its primary goals.

#### **VI. Announcements - none**

#### **VII. Next Meeting [01:26:01 – 01:26:25]**

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 16, 2026, at 1:30 p.m., online via Zoom and in person at 830 Punchbowl Street, Room 317.

#### **VIII. Adjournment [01:26:26]**

Meeting adjourned at 2:57 p.m.