

March 10, 2009

Director Warren Ribley
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
100 West Randolph, Suite 3-400
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Director Ribley:

The Chicago Jobs Council (CJC), our members and the endorsers of the *Illinois Works for the Future* campaign have been following the development and initial implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) very closely. ARRA presents an opportunity to help low-income Illinoisans get employment and develop new skills for better employment. Because we anticipate that the leadership at the Department of Employment and Economic Opportunity is in agreement with our interests, we hope to have the opportunity to meet with you in the near future.

From our perspective, in order to be as effective as possible, implementation of ARRA funding should prioritize the following: 1) Strengthening relationships between state programs and community-based service providers across the state; 2) To the extent possible, combining subsidized work with skill-building opportunities; and 3) Tying workforce education and training to jobs that are created through ARRA investments in the state.

When we meet with you we would prioritize the key state-level issues in ARRA implementation:

1. *Coordination amongst state agencies*

As you know, ARRA funds workforce development-related services through multiple funding streams. ARRA is an opportunity better connect workforce development with job opportunities that are created through infrastructure investments and other economic development funded in ARRA. We are particularly interested in:

- Exploring opportunities to connect the state's use of TANF Contingency Funds with WIA funding to create a better entry point for the least-skilled adults into educational and employment pathways;
- Exploring how expanded funding for energy efficiency and investments in renewable energy can be connected to workforce initiatives that ensure that Illinois has the skilled workforce as these industries expand;
- Understanding how DCEO and ICCB will coordinate as new competitive grant opportunities under WIA discretionary funds, new Trade Adjustment Assistance policies, and the new WIA contracts for training policies are implemented; and
- Understanding how new funding for employment services for unemployment benefit recipients may be coordinated with WIA services locally.

2. *Priority of services under WIA to low-income and those moving off of public assistance*

CJC and its members are pleased that the congressional intent of ARRA is clear that low-income individuals and people moving off of public assistance are a priority for WIA services and training. However, we are concerned that LWIAs may not have experience serving the lowest income individuals

and that the necessary relationships between the WIA system and community based providers may not be in place. While Chicago has a history of a strong affiliate system, CJC's outreach work across the state indicates that there is room for improvement to these relationships. We believe that community-based organizations need to be a key partner in effectively using the WIA funding under ARRA so that it reaches the low-income individuals and people moving off of public assistance that are a priority under ARRA. We think DCEO has a role in facilitation and encouraging local relationships with community-based organizations. Further DCEO can help local workforce areas to connect to and leverage services for low-income adults through IDHS employment-focused programs and the JTED and EOGP grant programs.

3. State-level opportunities

The increase in federal WIA funding under the ARRA means that the state will have discretion to use some of the funds for statewide activities. This presents the state with an important opportunity to consider how to ensure that communities have the capacity to provide workforce development services. Fostering and growing this capacity is especially critical in local workforce areas where there has been limited ability to provide services to individuals with multiple barriers to employment.

In addition to capacity building activities and technical assistance, it is also important that DCEO use the state recovery fund website and/or some other communication process to inform the local stakeholders. We understand the pressure that DCEO is under to implement ARRA quickly, but we are also aware that misinformation could cause confusion that could ultimately interfere with smooth implementation. At a minimum, CJC would like to be sure that information that we are providing to our members and allies across the state is accurate.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide you with our thoughts on the important issues that must be considered during the implementation of the ARRA funding. And, we look forward to meeting with you in the near future to have a more detailed conversation. Please feel free to contact me (bob@cjc.net, 312-252-0460 x330) or CJC's Associate Director, Carrie Thomas (carrie@cjc.net, 312-252-0460 x309) directly if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Robert E. Wordlaw
Executive Director

Cc: Jerry Stermer, Michelle Saddler, Jack Lavin, Bob Sheets