

More coordination and investment are needed to address Chicago's workforce needs

*New report released today by the Chicago Jobs Council examines
gaps and opportunities in Chicago's workforce system*

Chicago, IL (September 28)— Important segments of Chicago's eligible workforce do not have access to targeted programs to help them prepare for critical jobs in the labor market. According to a new report by the Chicago Jobs Council: *Big Shoulders, Big Challenges: Preparing Chicago's Workforce for the New Economy*, strategic investment is needed to ensure Chicago's veterans, immigrants, older workers, public housing residents, and the homeless gain job skills required by area employers and City departments must work together more effectively to maximize investment.

The report commends Chicago for workforce development strategies supported by nearly \$283 million of federal, state, and city funds in FY 2004. Chicago's workforce development innovations include the TIFWorks program, which helps businesses in forty-three Tax Increment Financing districts train their workforce, and new transitional jobs programs that help reconnect ex-offenders to the labor market.

"The report provides overwhelming evidence that connecting workforce development and economic development will help the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (MOWD) address the challenges the document sets forth," said MOWD Commissioner David Hanson. "Further integration of the two helps workforce development move away from the social services model that has existed, towards a system that creates higher quality opportunities for businesses and job seekers, and raises the overall value of Chicago's human capital."

Report recommendations for improving Chicago's workforce development system focus on better integration of Chicago's workforce and economic development systems; targeted interventions for job seekers who have limited skills; and capacity building in communities where too few opportunities are available.

Some Key Points of the Study:

- Jobs that pay family-supporting wages require a high school diploma and often postsecondary education or technical training.
- Some industries such as health care and transportation are already experiencing skill shortages.

- An estimated 41% of Chicago’s workforce will begin to retire in the next 15 years leaving a knowledge gap.
- Several social and economic factors are of concern—high school completion is low, prisoner re-entry is high, and the number Chicagoans with limited English proficiency or basic math and reading is high.
- Increased investment in low-skilled workers is vital to meeting future labor market needs.
- The City of Chicago has implemented several key workforce strategies and initiatives that should be continued and expanded
- Opportunities exist to improve the workforce development system for low-skilled workers, while supporting economic development in Chicago.

“In the 1990s business, government, parents, teachers, and civically-engaged residents successfully came together in Chicago to identify ways to improve the city’s K-12 school system. For Chicago to maintain its economic strength and assist those residents who are being affected by structural economic transformation, we will need a similar participatory discussion about our production of a skilled workforce. We hope this report will serve as a starting point and that a broad set of stakeholders will join us for that discussion,” said Robert E. Wordlaw, Executive Director of the Chicago Jobs Council.

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