



Region VII Workforce Development Board

February 3, 2026

Honorable Members of the West Virginia Legislature,

On behalf of the Region VII Workforce Development Board, I respectfully submit this letter to express significant concerns regarding House Bill 4594 and its proposed restructuring of workforce service delivery in West Virginia. While the Region VII Workforce Development Board supports continuous improvement, efficiency, and accountability within the state's workforce system, we believe HB 4594 would fundamentally undermine the intent of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), diminish effective service delivery to residents and employers, and raise serious legal and governance concerns.

West Virginia is an exceptionally diverse state; geographically, economically, and demographically. Workforce needs in the Eastern Panhandle and Potomac Highlands differ substantially from those in the southern coalfields, metropolitan Kanawha Valley, or northern manufacturing corridors. WIOA was intentionally designed as a federal–state–local partnership, recognizing that workforce solutions are most effective when tailored to local labor markets and employer demand.

Under the current regional structure, local workforce development boards work directly with employers, community and technical colleges, adult education providers, economic development organizations, and county leadership to respond quickly to real-time workforce needs. Eliminating local workforce development areas in favor of a single, centralized state system would significantly impair this responsiveness. A one-size-fits-all model cannot adequately address region-specific industry demand, transportation barriers, broadband limitations, or workforce participation challenges that vary widely across West Virginia.

Moreover, empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of localized systems. West Virginia's current WIOA structure serves a substantially higher percentage of its eligible population than many states operating as single-state workforce areas, such as Utah. This higher participation rate reflects the accessibility, trust, and community integration of locally governed workforce systems. This is particularly critical in rural Appalachia, where personal relationships and local presence are essential to engagement.

Beyond programmatic considerations, HB 4594 raises serious legal concerns under federal law. WIOA is explicit regarding the designation and governance of local workforce development areas. Pursuant to **WIOA Section 106 (29 U.S.C. § 3121)** and implementing regulations at **20 C.F.R. Part 679**, the authority to designate local workforce development areas resides with the Governor, in consultation with Local Elected Officials (LEOs), specifically county commissions and qualifying municipalities.

Federal regulation **20 C.F.R. § 679.270(a)** further restricts a state's ability to operate as a single workforce area, permitting such designation only if the state qualified as a single area under the



151 Robert C Byrd Industrial Park Road, Suite 2 • Moorefield, WV 26836
Phone: (304) 530-5258 • Fax: (304) 530-5107 • TDD: WV Relay 7-1-1
www.wvregion7workforce.org

Workforce Investment Act as of July 1, 2013. West Virginia does not meet this criterion. The U.S. Department of Labor has repeatedly affirmed that there is no statutory or regulatory pathway for a multi-area state to become a single-area state absent Congressional action.

Accordingly, legislative action mandating a single statewide workforce area would place West Virginia at significant risk of noncompliance with federal law, jeopardizing federal WIOA funding and exposing the state to corrective action, disallowed costs, or loss of grant eligibility.

Local workforce development boards provide an essential layer of fiscal oversight, transparency, and accountability. Local elected officials (county commissioners and mayors) are directly responsible for oversight of federal funds within their regions. This structure ensures workforce investments align with local priorities and public funds are stewarded responsibly.

Removing local boards would concentrate authority within a centralized agency, distancing decision-making from the communities most affected and weakening the accountability mechanisms embedded in WIOA. Such centralization risks slower response times, reduced employer engagement, and diminished trust among job seekers and community partners.

The Region VII Workforce Development Board strongly urges the Legislature to reconsider HB 4594 as currently drafted. While we fully support efforts to improve coordination, reduce duplication, and enhance system performance, these goals can and should be achieved within the existing WIOA framework, not through a restructuring that conflicts with federal law and undermines proven, locally driven service delivery.

We respectfully request that the Legislature preserve West Virginia's regional workforce development structure and engage local boards, county officials, employers, and workforce customers in any future reform discussions. Doing so will protect federal funding, strengthen service delivery, and ensure West Virginia's workforce system remains responsive to the people and businesses it is intended to serve.

Thank you for your consideration and continued commitment to West Virginia's workforce and economic future.

Respectfully submitted,



Thomas J. Van Meter
Executive Director
Region VII Workforce Development Board



Honorable Stephen Catlett
Chief Local Elected Official
Region VII Workforce Development Board



Ms. Layne Diehl
Board Chair
Region VII Workforce Development Board