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June 5, 2008

Senator Dale W. Schultz  
Room 127 South  
State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53707-7882

**RE: UPCOMING IMPROVEMENTS TO WISCONSIN'S EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICES**

Dear Senator Schultz:

I write to share information about the steps the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) is taking to transform our employment and training services to best meet the needs of Wisconsin's workers and employers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First, let me give you some background.

**BACKGROUND**

Wisconsin's job center system was created almost twenty-five years ago, with a short-term \$10 million federal start-up grant. Not only are those one-time dollars long-gone, but also according to a 2004 analysis by the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center on Wisconsin Strategy, federal employment and training funding to Wisconsin was cut by 56% between 1984 and 2004. Furthermore, since 2004, our federal funding has been cut even more.

Neither the state nor DWD oversee or operate job centers – the designation of job centers and their management are conducted locally by regional workforce development boards. The state is only one of many service providers in job centers. Therefore, the state does not open or close job centers. We are not now closing any job centers.

When the system was created, supported by federal funding, the state had far more Job Service and Veterans staff than now, located in dozens of centers statewide. On top of this, the system was, of course, created before widespread use of computers, and the advent of the Internet. The world has now changed. Technology is everywhere and, additionally, at the very time we need more skilled workers than ever before, few citizens actually visit Wisconsin's job centers. The same holds true for our employer community. Employers often seek job candidates elsewhere because the technology our staff has been using in centers is not cutting-edge or user-friendly compared to what job seekers and employers can find using other Internet sources.

Because our shrinking resources have been spread so thin, too little of our funding has been going into actually serving job seekers and employers with skills assessment, career advising and training. Too much of our capacity has been consumed with overhead costs such as rent, computer lines and publications.

States everywhere are facing such challenges. Now is the time to do things differently, to better use our precious resources to provide the highest quality workforce development services possible to job seekers and employers. I very much appreciate all the helpful feedback we have received on the

improvements we are making from many of our partners around the state including leadership from workforce development boards, technical colleges, the Council on Workforce Investment, business, labor, counties and W-2 agencies. We believe that Wisconsin can be a national leader in providing services that are comprehensive, technologically advanced, effective and efficient.

## **STRENGTHENING SERVICES THROUGH TWELVE COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL CAREER AND SKILL CENTER HUBS AND AN ADVANCED NEW VIRTUAL JOB CENTER**

To redirect more funds to assessment, career advising, training and advancement opportunities for workers, by December 31, 2008, we will be stationing our current Job Service and Veterans staff in twelve comprehensive regional sites across the state: Kenosha; two in Milwaukee, given its size; Pewaukee; Menasha; Green Bay; Wausau; Superior; Eau Claire; La Crosse; Madison; and, Janesville. The sites were selected based on population, workforce needs, available resources and efficiencies. We will work closely with our regional partners to implement these changes, which will involve seven key elements:

### **1. REDIRECTING STAFF TO PROVIDE MOBILE SERVICES OUT OF REGIONAL HUBS**

Though our staff will operate out of twelve regional office hubs, they will be mobile throughout the region, having the capacity to travel to and hold office hours in other locations as needed.

### **2. CREATING A NEW VIRTUAL JOB CENTER**

We will fund and implement an innovative new and easy to use virtual job center, which will give job seekers and employers the ability to reach DWD and each other across Wisconsin anywhere, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The virtual job center will offer features such as posting of resumes and job orders; initial screening of job candidates; online personal job search assistance and job interviews; online job fairs, workshops and seminars; and, videoconferencing. This will expand our ability to reach thousands of new customers all over the state. We will have staff and technical support available to help individuals who may be new to using computers and technology, and we will offer that assistance in small communities and neighborhoods throughout Wisconsin.

### **3. REACHING OUT TO ALL OF WISCONSIN PROACTIVELY**

We are committed to serving every community, whether large or small and urban or rural. We will not just wait for job seekers to come to us; we will reach out to our customers around the state through a variety of sites including technical colleges, community organizations and libraries. We will be able to reach more communities and individuals, including unemployed and underemployed workers, something we know is now more important than ever before.

### **4. INCREASING CONNECTIONS OF WORKERS TO JOB TRAINING AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES**

We will increase our enrollment of workers in training and pathways to higher wage work. We will re-train our own staff so that they can deliver needed assessment, career advising and training services to customers. Our staff will increase the connection of workers to skills through technical college training.

## 5. ESTABLISHING STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYERS

We will reach out more aggressively to employers to meet their workforce needs and connect them with qualified job seekers. We will also improve our referrals to employers and expand their pool of workers to consider for future hiring needs.

## 6. CONTINUING STRONG SERVICES TO WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) will continue to serve its caseload of consumers with disabilities based on where those individuals live. Some of our DVR counselors will be stationed in the twelve comprehensive sites, and others, depending upon where their consumers reside, will remain in other community sites, including other existing job center locations.

## 7. CONTINUING EXCELLENT SERVICES TO VETERANS AND DISLOCATED WORKERS

Providing the best services possible to veterans and dislocated workers continues to be a top-priority for DWD, particularly given these challenging times in our nation and around the world. Using our twelve sites and our capacity for mobile and virtual services and office hours, we will help all dislocated workers get connected to all of the assessment, re-training support and placement services they need. We will give the same strong attention to the needs of veterans, many of whom are now returning from service with special challenges or disabilities.

## WORKING TOGETHER

All of us at DWD look forward to working with you and all of our statewide partners over the weeks and months ahead as we work, in a time of great need, to transform and strengthen our employment and training services. Our goal is for every single job seeker and employer to have access to the resources they need to be successful. We believe that by consolidating services, reducing overhead and offering an expanded scope of assistance via innovative staffing, increased service hours and cutting-edge technologies, we will strengthen Wisconsin's employment and training system.

Given the opportunities and challenges we face, we are working to responsibly address our own staffing and space plans while meeting the needs of workers, employers and the state. And in our commitment to those we serve, we will not be cutting any staff positions as we make these changes.

I hope that you find this information helpful. If you have any questions, please contact Rex Loehe, Executive Staff Assistant at DWD, at [Rex.Loehe@dwd.state.wi.us](mailto:Rex.Loehe@dwd.state.wi.us) or 608-266-1756.

Best regards,

  
Roberta Gassman  
Secretary