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Strengthening West Virginia's Workforce: A Multifaceted Approach to Economic Prosperity



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James Bailey serves as the Cabinet Secretary for the West Virginia Department of Commerce, appointed in 2022 by Governor Jim Justice. Prior to this appointment, he was the Deputy Secretary of Commerce and served concurrently as the General Counsel for the Departments of Commerce, Tourism, and Economic Development. Bailey previously served Governor Justice as his Senior Counsel for Policy and Legislation. He also has extensive legislative experience, including serving as Counsel to the President of the West Virginia Senate. Bailey holds a B.S. in journalism and a J.D. from West Virginia University.

Workforce development is a paramount issue for West Virginia as we navigate the evolving economic landscape and seek to capitalize on the tremendous investments we've seen over the last several years. Historically, West Virginia has faced the challenge of having more job seekers than jobs. The economic growth that we have experienced over the last several years has led us to face a much more welcomed challenge: "How can we fill all of these new jobs?" As more and more investments have flown into the state, we have heard increasingly more from prospective employers that a ready and qualified workforce is at the top of their priority list.

The West Virginia Department of Commerce is at the forefront of our state's efforts on this issue. The Department is engaged in numerous initiatives aimed at fortifying our workforce, addressing employer needs, and driving economic prosperity. These



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which is organized within the Department of Commerce and serves as the state's one-stop center for workforce resources, including job opportunities, available training, tax incentives, unemployment compensation, and labor market information. Once known primarily as an unemployment agency, WFWV has transitioned into an employment-focused agency under Governor Jim Justice's direction. This shift includes offering tailored assistance to job seekers, such as hands-on case management, resume writing, skills assessments, and training opportunities.

To better serve our citizens and facilitate economic growth, WFWV has proactively worked with employers across the state to

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Many of the state's workforce efforts are led by WorkForce West Virginia (WFWV),

determine employer needs and pair job seekers with available job opportunities. WFWV provides employers 24/7 access to the state's largest online database of potential job candidates – the Mid-Atlantic Career Consortium (MACC). Employers can post active job listings through this portal and receive and review applications. Additionally,



WorkForce

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since October 2022, WFWV has hosted monthly Statewide Virtual Job Fairs that provide employers and job seekers a convenient virtual platform to learn more about available opportunities, ask questions, and submit resumes. These fairs have been highly successful, having connected over 13,000 job seekers with more than 2,500 employers, leading to over 106,000 virtual connections.

It has become evident that connecting employers to qualified job seekers is a critical element to meeting our workforce demands. In recognition of this, the Department of Commerce has forged a first of its kind partnership with Jobcase, one of the nation's premier job aggregators. There is now a national online platform for West Virginia employers to post job listings and reach applicants at no cost: www.jobcase.com/wv. Employment opportunities can be promoted regionally or nationally, which provides millions of job seekers the ability to search for opportunities across West Virginia.

The Department of Commerce is also leading innovative efforts to provide advanced workforce development resources. One notable example, which was announced by Governor Justice in his 2024 State of the State Address, is the state's participation in the Amazon Web Services (AWS) Skills to Jobs Tech Alliance. The Tech Alliance will establish partnerships across state government, higher education, and the private sector to prioritize creating and retaining high-paying, high-growth jobs. West Virginia is only the fourth state to be selected for this program, which aims to bridge the employment gap by providing nationally recognized training for modern tech careers, specifically focusing on cybersecurity. It is currently

projected that during the 2024-2025 academic year, the West Virginia Tech Alliance will directly connect cloud employers to more than 750 learners.

Another critical aspect of our strategy involves forging strong partnerships between educational institutions and industries. These collaborations are essential for creating training programs that are tailored to the specific needs of employers. Our community and technical colleges, such as BridgeValley Community and Technical College and Blue Ridge Community and Technical College, have been instrumental in developing curricula that align with the demands of key industries in their respective regions.

Of course, the Department of Commerce also works extensively with our two flagship research institutions, West Virginia University and Marshall University. For example, the Department is collaborating with these partners to develop strategies that will retain the state's college graduates from our two- and four-year higher education institutions by connecting them with job opportunities in the state.

The aforementioned initiatives are just a sampling of the multifaceted approach by the state to effectively tackle workforce challenges. These proactive efforts seek to remove barriers to employment and enhance recruitment and retention strategies. Workforce development is essential for West Virginia's future. By investing in education, training, and supportive services, we enhance the employability of our citizens and foster economic growth and resilience in the Mountain State. 