

Connecting job seekers with jobs in Md.

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COOL TIPS

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There are thousands of job postings in Maryland, with persistent complaints from employers that there are no qualified candidates.

There are thousands of Marylanders currently unemployed or underemployed for several reasons, including criminal records, disabilities, language barriers, transportation and child care challenges.

Lots of job openings and lots of people seeking employment Hmm. How interesting that opposite sides of the issue cannot be addressed simultaneously to arrive at effective solutions and reduce unemployment while increasing productivity. I challenge this disconnection.

One of our core services is bilingual & bicultural staffing, yet a high percentage of our entry-level candidates need a lot of resources, from acculturation, navigating corporate culture, interview skills, resume writing to mentoring. And this doesn't take into consideration the need for technical or trade skills. So here lies the crux of the problem — people want to work but they lack the skills, resources and access to opportunities that drive real economic change.

In an effort to address the tremendous disconnect or gap in talent, skill, employment and pipeline, I am honored to have been appointed to serve on the Governor's Workforce Investment Board (GWIB). The GWIB is Maryland's chief policymaking body on workforce development, innovation and opportunity. The board is led by 45 members, a majority of whom represent the business community, as mandated by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. Members include the governor and the lieutenant governor, Cabinet secretaries, college presidents, the state superintendent of schools, elected officials, labor leaders and representatives of nonprofit organizations.

The GWIB is responsible for developing policies and strategies to form a coordinated workforce system from a variety of education, and employment and training programs. It brings together and focuses various workforce development partners and stakeholders on two key outcomes — a properly prepared workforce that meets the current and future demands of Maryland employers, and opportunities for all Marylanders to succeed in the 21st century workforce.

Allow me to emphasize the “POLICYMAKING” point. The GWIB can address the employment disconnect by implementing tactics, convening programs and organizing collaborative efforts.

While at the board meeting last week, I discovered a plethora of resources. Now, I consider myself a rather intelligent and very informed individual ... and if I wasn't aware of these resources, how are disadvantaged and disconnected folks to be aware?

First “aha” moment: the Maryland American Job Centers, with over 30 locations across our state, readily available for job seekers to get extensive support, including training, resume-writing, career counseling and job opportunities. Also very helpful for the employers in the region. This is a great resource to post jobs and source potential candidates.

I also learned about the automotive employment program launched by Vehicles for Changes — those cars we donate go to the mechanic shop operated by Vehicles for Change, which in turn employs second-chance individuals. As they are trained to learn and fine-tune their automotive mechanic skills, they earn an honest living. Win-Win.

Here's the challenge: I know and understand the issues affecting the Hispanic community, such as language barriers, need for further education, transportation, living wages, and access to health care and technology opportunities. But I don't know what barriers exist for every other group, such as the community of people with disabilities. Quoting my friend Virginia Knowlton Marcus, executive director of the [Maryland Disability Law Center](#), “People with disabilities face an extremely high unemployment rate — double that of non-disabled people — and thousands of Marylanders with disabilities are still being paid less than minimum wage in segregated workshops — in 2015!”

I'm asking YOU to provide feedback regarding the gaps in employment, workforce development and education, especially as they pertain to your world and sphere. What is broken? What's not working? What could work better?

But as the leaders that you are, I expect solutions as well. So do make recommendations on how these challenges can be addressed. Are there programs already in place that we are not aware of? I'm a fan of never duplicating effort, but rather forming alliances, partnerships and leveraging funds, resources and connections to arrive at practical and implementable solutions.

Knowing that Hispanics are notoriously underrepresented within the financial services industry, we partnered with the William & Lanaea Featherstone Foundation to create one such solution. We launched Reaching New Heights, a workforce development program to provide computer literacy and professional development to Hispanic adults in Baltimore, focusing in the financial services Industry. This seven-week program culminates with prepared, eager candidates seeking to advance themselves professionally in banking, insurance and the mortgage industry. And now these candidates are interviewing with institutions, such as BB&T, PNC, State Farm, New York Life and Primerica that see their potential, despite their lack of experience. Progress.

My expectations out of this civic involvement on the GWIB, in conjunction with my fellow board members, is that we begin to connect the dots for our state.

I invite you to share your insight and feedback with me, your resources and employment opportunities. We can build bridges to connect the employment gap.

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