



State of Utah

GARY R. HERBERT
Governor

SPENCER J. COX
Lieutenant Governor

Department of
Workforce Services

JON S. PIERPONT
Executive Director

CASEY R. CAMERON
Deputy Director

GREG PARAS
Deputy Director

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Education and the Workforce
*Strengthening Access and Accountability to Work in
Welfare Programs*

Strengthening Access and Accountability to Work in Welfare Programs

United States House of Representatives Committee on

Education and the Workforce

March 15, 2018 10:00 a.m.

Written Testimony of Liz Carver

Workforce Development Program Division Director

with the Utah Department of Workforce Services

Thank you Chairman Guthrie, ranking member Davis and members of the subcommittee. I am honored to be here representing the state of Utah, our Governor and the Executive Director of Workforce Services. It's fitting that our state was asked to provide input on our work-first approach. After all, Utah's nickname is *The Beehive State*, with the beehive standing as a symbol of hard work and industry.

More than 20 years ago, Governor Michael Leavitt and Lt. Governor Olene Walker organized a taskforce to evaluate Utah's workforce and welfare models. We had more than 29 programs spread out over state agencies. Quoting Governor Leavitt, "It just cried out for a better solution." The taskforce ultimately created the Department of Workforce Services, comprised of all of the state's workforce and welfare programs, with the intent of providing better services to Utah citizens. Today, the Department manages the following:

- Workforce development programs including WIOA, veterans employment, and Wagner-Peysner;
- Unemployment insurance;
- Welfare programs including SNAP, Medicaid, CHIP, Child Care and TANF cash assistance;
- Vocational rehabilitation programs and other services for people with disabilities;
- Child care subsidy programs;
- Refugee services;
- Housing and community development; and
- Labor market information to help people make informed decisions

We believe this model works well in good times and bad. We've been fortunate to experience 48 consecutive months of less than four percent unemployment. We know this model assists Utahns in getting their first jobs, finding better jobs and obtaining fulfilling careers.



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Each of these programs benefit from operating under a unified, single-state agency with:

- One leadership structure;
- Streamlined service delivery;
- Braided funding sources;
- Integrated technology solutions; and
- A single established brand.

When the decision was made to bring all of the welfare and workforce programs together, the state made a few important commitments.

First, the commitment to exceptional customer service. As Governor Leavitt stated: “There has to be a better way.” By bringing these programs together, we created a one-stop system for providing services. One website and a common entrance to receive services that would otherwise send citizens in need to multiple locations. We believe we are better equipped to deliver these services because our staff are well educated in overseeing multiple programs, we utilize our integrated computer systems to share information about the individuals and families we serve, and we are able to complete much of our state and federal reporting through these electronic connections.

Second, the commitment to technology. Over the last 20 years with the evolution of online and social media, no organization can properly serve their customers without an investment in technology. This is the world in which we now live. Fortunately for Utah, this commitment started 20 years ago with building a strong online platform and ensuring customers can access our services through multiple options at their convenience, whether over the phone, online or face-to-face. Our American Job Centers’ public computers offer a variety of job-related and community resource opportunities. These computers allow for self-directed service and are supplemented with staff who can provide mediated assistance.

Third, the commitment to being family focused. This includes Utah’s initiative to dive into what we call our “intergenerational poverty research” to fully understand the cycles of poverty from one generation to another. We are committed to understanding and identifying barriers within the home that are preventing families from progressing and obtaining employment that provides sustainability and mobility. The focus on the family is not something new to Utah; and, in fact, many states are building two-generation support models to better identify and breakdown the barriers preventing families from progressing in life.

To further illustrate how an integrated model is allowing Utah to be more “work-first” driven, let me share a few examples.

jobs.utah.gov



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- Unemployment Insurance — The Re-employment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program assists individuals receiving unemployment benefits to reconnect to employment. Individuals receiving unemployment benefits that have been identified as likely to exhaust their benefit are connected to an in-person assessment and re-employment services through local American Job Centers. Activities include developing individual re-employment plans, providing labor market information, identifying job skills and prospects and reviewing claimants' continued unemployment insurance benefits. Utah's integrated model allows unemployment insurance, labor market information and workforce development to work seamlessly together, enhancing the customer's experience while efficiently and quickly re-engaging them into the workforce.
- TANF — On top of maximizing our funding options for this program and blending it with WIOA, we have been able to leverage our workforce expertise with TANF recipients to engage in customized cohort education pilot programs. These have resulted in soft skill development, credential attainment and employment in the medical manufacturing industry. We started with a program for single mothers in poverty and plan to build upon this success with an upcoming project to assist absent fathers with similar opportunities that we hope will result in both employment and fathers re-engaging with their children. This project should begin in late spring to early summer.
- American Job Centers and online tools — Customers receiving public assistance benefits are connected to work through online and American Job Center access points. This includes an online assessment to determine a customer's need to build additional work search skills, such as resume writing, networking and interviewing. Based on the assessment, 20-minute online employer driven workshops that help teach effective job searching and employment soft skills are offered. In the job centers, customers seeking public assistance are also connected to work search activities, such as our Work Success groups where individuals participate in an intensive two- to four-week job search course. They may also be connected to education for industry-recognized credentialing, ready access to open jobs, skilled employment counselors who specialize in job search coaching, and a variety of online and in-person workshops that assist individuals in obtaining sustainable employment.
- SNAP and work requirements — Utah was one of the first states to eliminate exemptions from time limits for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) when the economy started to recover from the recession. Additionally, Utah is one of only a handful of states that require mandatory SNAP participants to engage in Employment and Training activities.

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Let me end by addressing work requirements and activities taking place in Utah. Because “work first” is a priority and our systems are aligned and operate as a single identity, this principle is no longer something we just believe in, it is a standard practice.

When someone needs to apply for SNAP or Medicaid, they do it through an online portal on JOBS.utah.gov where job-seeking services are readily available.

When someone needs face-to-face service for public assistance program eligibility, they come to one location, an American Job Center, where employers are often on site recruiting for available jobs, and our staff engage citizens in work and education opportunities.

When a TANF customer needs child care support to obtain and maintain employment, we are able to more easily connect the dots quickly and assist in removing barriers because our programs work together.

I would like to leave you with some recommendations from Utah regarding work requirements. Here are a few to consider:

1. We recommend outcome-based measures. Focusing on individual activity in programs is not an effective way to measure progress. For example, measuring skills gained, credentials attained and employment secured. One leading indicator we look at to help reach these outcomes is individuals overcoming barriers, such as graduation from high school or completion of an addiction program.
2. Continue to encourage integration of programs at the federal level to help states implement them at the local level. WIOA requires program integration with TANF and Unemployment Compensation among other required partners. We know that for many states this has not been an easy transition. We can empathize with these states. Even though we did this 20-plus years ago, it took multiple years of research, coordination and a governor leading the charge to make the change. If it is siloed at the federal level, it will likely remain siloed at the state level.
3. Allow individuals to access education that leads to a recognized credential as an option under work requirements. We find this to be an effective tool for helping individuals out of poverty and into sustainable employment.



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4. Align work requirements across programs and give states the flexibility to implement how this is done. This is a better option for an individual accessing services, as well. One example is to continue to allow flexibility for the use of technology to help administer work requirements. We live in a time when upcoming generations communicate through the use of technology before communicating directly with individuals. We observe this regularly with our WIOA Youth customers who prefer to utilize text messaging to coordinate with their employment counselor and submit participation documentation.

Finally, we regularly host other states interested in our model who ask questions about “where to begin,” or “how to replicate.” Through our labor of love over the past 20-plus years, the feedback we offer is that “it’s not one single thing.” Merely having a single leadership structure or program co-location will not necessarily duplicate our results. We have observed the need for a total package of leadership, culture, technology, braided funding and a commitment to serving fellow citizens.

Thank you.