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Deploying Job Service Staff to Meet Needs of 21st Century Economy

Secretary Roberta Gassman Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

Governor Jim Doyle recently announced that nearly one million job openings are anticipated in Wisconsin by 2016. Occupations with good wages, career opportunities and unmet employer need include nursing, carpentry, welding and many more. We must do all that we can to connect job seekers to skills and employers to skilled workers now and in the years ahead. That's the challenge we face with our local partners in workforce development, and we all win when we work together to make the best use of existing resources.

The current job center system was created almost 25 years ago, before computers and the Internet were commonplace. In today's high-tech, fast-paced, global economy, the Department of Workforce Development must transform its employment and training services to best meet the needs of Wisconsin's workers and employers in the 21st century. In the months ahead, DWD will take steps to meet the needs of job seekers and employers, given the dramatic changes that have occurred since the job center system began.

DWD will deploy its Job Service and veterans staff in strategic locations as a first step to improving services. Staff will be assigned to 22 locations, two sites in each of Wisconsin's 11 regional workforce development regions. From these sites, our mobile staff will circulate throughout their regions, taking a more pro-active approach. They will go where they are needed, whether to community centers, libraries or technical colleges, serving more communities than those where local job centers currently exist.

Our efforts to reach out to jobseekers and employers in every community, from small to large and rural to urban, will be enhanced significantly through technology. As a second step, at DWD and in collaboration with our statewide workforce development partners, we are developing service improvements and an innovative, easy-to-use virtual job center with access statewide, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Jobseekers will be able to post resumes and get online job search assistance. Employers will be able to post job openings, screen candidates and conduct interviews. We will launch in September, and eventually we will provide video conferences and workshops for job seekers over the Internet.

The combination of 22 strategically located offices, mobile staff, flexible office hours and a new virtual job center will improve services to job seekers, including veterans and the disabled, as well as to employers.

As we make these changes, it is important to note that DWD is not closing any local job centers. Job centers are run by regional workforce development boards and usually include several partner agencies. DWD's changes will result in a stronger, more comprehensive effort.

In deploying staff, DWD will free approximately \$350,000 now spent on rent and overhead costs, to improve services. We must continually search for innovative ways to become more efficient as federal funds that pay for employment and training services continue to decline, having fallen 13 percent in the past three years.

As it stands now, our shrinking federal resources have been spread so thin that too little state support has been going into actually serving jobseekers and employers with skills assessment, career advising and training. Our limited funds have been consumed with overhead such as rent and computer lines.

Our goal is for every single job seeker and employer to have access to the resources they need to succeed. Working together, we will continue to grow Wisconsin's economy and develop our skilled workforce. Working together, we all win.

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