

GET INVOLVED!

THE JOB OPPORTUNITIES
TASK FORCE NEEDS YOUR HELP



Maryland's legislative session is in full swing! Contact Melissa Broome at **(410) 234-8046** if you're interested in assisting with JOTF's advocacy efforts, or if you'd like to receive weekly policy updates during the legislative session.



JOTF is looking for people who have experienced difficulty securing employment. Help us collect stories to share with policymakers and employers by submitting recommendations to rodney@jotf.org.



Would you like to support JOTF's work? Your contribution can help us reach our annual fundraising goal. To learn more about how you can help sustain our efforts to advance low-wage workers to high wage jobs, please contact us at **(410) 234-8040**. Donations can be sent to 111 Water Street, Suite 201, Baltimore, MD 21202.

JOTF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. If you would like to support our efforts to help low-income workers and job seekers please contact jessica@jotf.org or call **410-234-8040**.

Meet Our Board and Staff:

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Melanie Styles, President
Abell Foundation

Deborah Eisenberg, Vice President
University of Maryland School of Law

Kevin Jordan, Treasurer
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)

Avis Ransom, Secretary
Morgan State University

Katharine Caldwell
Johns Hopkins University School of Education

Patrice Cromwell
Annie E. Casey Foundation

Jason Frank
Frank, Frank & Scherr, LLC

Tomi Hiers
Mayor's Office of Human Services

Phil C. Holmes
Goodwill Industries of the Chesapeake

Darryn Jones
Maryland Department of Budget
and Management

David Kandel
The Algebra Project

Jean Lewis
Kramon & Graham, P.A.

Lynda Meade
Catholic Charities

Joanne Nathans
JOTF Founding President

Pamela Paulk
Johns Hopkins Hospital

Michael Pinard
University of Maryland School of Law

Marion Pines
JHU Institute for Policy Studies

STAFF

Jason Perkins-Cohen, Executive Director

Melissa Chalmers Broome, Senior Policy Advocate

Rodney Foxworth, Program Manager

Andrea Payne Roethke, Senior Policy Analyst

Jessica Traskey, Finance & Grants Manager

Natisha Willis, Administrative Assistant

Caryn York, Policy Advocate Associate

JOTF CELEBRATES TEN YEARS OF ADVOCACY & INNOVATION

By Andrea Payne Roethke / Photos courtesy of Jay Moore Photography

In 1996, two community leaders suggested two different theories to explain Baltimore's underemployment problem. One suggested that there simply weren't enough high-quality job opportunities to fully employ the local workforce. The other suggested that there was a gap between the skill demands of local employers and the education and training of Baltimore workers. Joanne Nathans, a long-time advocate for social justice issues, realized that this critical question needed more discussion and concrete solutions. Together with a small group of advocates, workforce providers, and foundation staff, Nathans established a task force to address the issues facing low-skill job seekers.

Four years later, the group decided to establish the Job Opportunities Task Force as an official non-profit with full-time staff. The organization was created with a mission "to develop and advocate policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-income workers and job seekers."

On October 7th, more than 150 JOTF supporters gathered to celebrate ten successful years. The reception was held at the Johns Hopkins University's Glass Pavilion. The event was emceed by Pamela Paulk, JOTF Board Member and Vice President of Human Resources at Johns Hopkins Hospital, and featured a keynote address from Bob Giloth, Vice President of the Center for Family Economic Success at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Attendees also heard remarks from JOTF Founding President Joanne Nathans, current Executive Director Jason Perkins-Cohen, and Johns Hopkins University Special Advisor on Economic Development Andrew Frank.

At the event, JOTF celebrated its major milestones over the past ten years, and its successes in advancing the agenda for working families:

1996: A dozen concerned Baltimoreans begin meeting to learn about employment prospects for low-skill residents.

1997: The Abell Foundation provides funding for a "job gap" study of the Baltimore region.

1999: The first job gap report, *Baltimore Area Jobs and Low-Skill Job Seekers: Assessing the Gaps*, is published.

2000: JOTF incorporates and receives 501(c)(3) status from the IRS. Joanne Nathans becomes JOTF's first Board Chair and Clifford Collins starts as JOTF's first Executive Director.

2002: Deborah Povich named JOTF's second Executive Director.

2003: JOTF releases second job gap report, *Baltimore's Choice: Workers and Jobs for a Thriving Economy*.

2004: JOTF publishes major Working Poor Families Project report, *Connecting Low-Income Families to Good Jobs: A Policy Road Map for Maryland*.



Left: Bob Giloth addresses the audience. Right: Event programs ready to be picked up.

2005: Jason Perkins-Cohen becomes JOTF's third Executive Director, and Diane Bell-McCoy is elected JOTF Board President.

2006: JOTF's JumpStart program established, offering pre-apprenticeship in the construction trades.

2007: JOTF releases its first issue brief outlining an unemployment insurance reform agenda, and exposes the high cost of being poor in *Overpriced & Underserved: How the Market is Failing Low-Wage Baltimoreans*. JOTF and partners win automatic expungement of arrests without charge.

2008: After two year campaign, Flexible Leave Act signed into law. Legislation also passes allowing nuisance crimes to be expunged. JOTF launches PastForward campaign marketing the employment potential of workers with criminal records. Melanie Styles elected JOTF Board President, and JOTF becomes fiscal agent for the Maryland CASH Campaign.

2009: JOTF and partners win unemployment insurance benefits for part-time workers. JOTF becomes fiscal agent for the Baltimore CASH Campaign.

2010: JOTF and Associated Black Charities release joint report, *Expanding Baltimore's Black Middle Class: Workforce Strategies for Advancing Prosperity*.

This year, as JOTF celebrates 10 years of advocacy and innovation, we thank you for your ongoing support and look forward to another decade of policy change that improves the lives of working Marylanders.



The crowd acknowledges Joanne Nathans, JOTF Founding President.

HIGHWAY TO SUCCESS

By Rodney Foxworth

Worker advocates across the country have discovered an unlikely ally in the struggle for skills training dollars: The U.S. Department of Transportation.

US Code, Title 23 – Highways, Section 140, authorizes the U.S. Department of Transportation to allow states to use federal highway funds for training and skill improvement programs. This provision links economic development and transportation infrastructure to workforce policy; allowing states to dedicate ½ of 1 percent of appropriated federal surface transportation and bridge funds to support related workforce training. As an example, Maryland received \$236 million in federal transportation funding in fiscal year 2009—which would have yielded nearly \$1.2 million in dedicated workforce training funds.

Workforce training, especially for occupations with a shortage of skilled workers, is an essential means to mitigating national and local unemployment dilemmas. The official U.S. unemployment rate has been as high as 9.8 percent, and while Maryland's 7.4 percent rate has been lower than the national average, it has more than doubled since the start of the Great Recession. Several jurisdictions across the state are experiencing unemployment levels that far exceed the national average; for example, Baltimore City has an alarming 11 percent unemployment rate. Furthermore, official unemployment rates greatly understate the number of unemployed individuals: estimates suggest that the true rate is at least double the reported number, as many individuals have discontinued their job search and therefore not officially "unemployed"

Workforce training, especially for occupations with a shortage of skilled workers, is an essential means to mitigating national and local unemployment dilemmas.

Most disheartening, in many parts of the U.S., there are 5 applicants for every job opening, and economists across the political spectrum assert that we face structural unemployment—that many of the jobs lost are never coming back, leaving millions of individuals desperate to acquire new skills. This comes at a time when job training funds are declining, and the federal government is proposing billions more in job training cuts. And this says nothing of the millions of low-skill, low-income workers who require further training and more opportunities to advance into careers with family-sustaining wages. When confronting such a bleak economic environment, policymakers are faced with a task that requires significant creativity to resolve.

US Code, Title 23 – Highways, Section 140 offers an important opportunity to move in the right direction, allowing necessary investments in transportation infrastructure and the workforce, particularly for low-income people who have traditionally been denied access to training for careers in transportation construction.

Some states have already taken advantage of this provision, and see it as a great method to integrate workforce development into their economic and infrastructure policies. Minnesota has enacted a statute requiring its Department of Transportation to use the allowable training funds, with considerable oversight of the funds by the state legislature. Other states, including Michigan, Missouri, and Wisconsin, have implemented training programs even without legislative action.

As federal and state governments continue to disinvest and underfund job training programs during this long-lasting unemployment crisis, it is critical that we find new ways to prepare our workforce for work opportunities.

Michigan, for example, used an executive order to access the highway funds to fully finance its Road Construction Apprenticeship Readiness Program (RCAR). RCAR was launched in the beginning of 2008 and has already graduated over 100 participants. The RCAR program prepares minorities and women for careers in road construction by equipping them with the skills and certification needed to enter into and succeed in road construction apprenticeships. Participants are selected from targeted areas with the highest percentage of road construction projects. The program provides 240 hours of job readiness and training, employment barrier removal, and placement assistance.

Missouri is another state that has demonstrated success using a portion of its federal highway project funds for job training and the state is regarded as a model for effective use of the funds. The Missouri Department of Transportation agreed that low-income construction apprentices would make up 30 percent of the work force on a recently completed \$500 million highway project and utilized the provision to train low-income residents in construction work. The project was completed 24 days ahead of schedule and \$11 million under budget.

Because of successes seen throughout the states, USDOT is promoting use of the provision on a number of major transportation projects across the country, each with project budgets exceeding \$500 million, including: Denver, Colorado; Louisville, Kentucky; Hartford, Connecticut; Phoenix, Arizona and; Brooklyn, New York.

As federal and state governments continue to disinvest and underfund job training programs during this long-lasting unemployment crisis, it is critical that we find new ways to prepare our workforce for work opportunities. US Code, Title 23 – Highways, Section 140 presents legislators across the country with an important opportunity to invest simultaneously in their transportation infrastructure and in the economic health and skills of their communities—a real win-win for state economies.

JOTF PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA: SESSION 2011

By Melissa Broome

As the 2011 session of the Maryland General Assembly gets underway, legislators will be asked to make tough decisions regarding the state's tremendous budget deficit.

With Marylanders continuing to struggle through these difficult economic times, JOTF remains committed to advocating on behalf of the state's low-income workers and their families.

During Maryland's 90-day session, JOTF will pursue legislative and budget initiatives that promote employment and training opportunities for out-of-work residents, ex-offender reentry, and post-secondary and adult education.

Reduce barriers to work for out-of-work Marylanders.

Maryland's official unemployment rate has doubled over the past three years – from 3.6% in September 2007 to 7.5% in September 2010. In these trying economic times, many unemployed residents are experiencing financial hardship, which negatively impacts their credit. Job-seekers are behind on their bills because they don't have a job, but they can't get a job because they're behind on their bills. More importantly, there is no research to show any statistical correlation between what is in someone's credit report and their likelihood to fail on the job.

Solution

- Limit employers' use of credit checks in hiring. About 60% of employers use credit history checks as a tool in their pre-employment screening even if the information has no relation to the job.

Promote successful re-entry and employment of ex-offenders.

Each year approximately 15,000 inmates return from prison to communities across Maryland. Their criminal record and low education levels are enormous barriers to mainstream employment. By adopting policies that will promote the long-term employment of former inmates, we can help ensure that these Marylanders find legitimate work, contribute to the economy, and turn their lives around.

Solutions

- Address the issue of monthly parole fees.
- Remove the question from job applications that asks applicants if they have ever been convicted of a crime.
- Reduce the impact of a criminal background on employment.

Enhance training, employment opportunities for low-skill, low-wage workers.

Maryland's low-income workers need access to training in order to advance in the workplace and obtain jobs with family supporting wages. In these challenging economic times when jobs are scarce and employers are looking for workers with specific skills, it is even more important for the state to increase its investment in training and hiring.

Solutions

- Expand state and local policies to increase employment opportunities for low-skill adults through public works expenditures.
- Increase funding for workforce training programs that will upgrade the skills of entry level and incumbent workers.
- Reduce the barriers for adults to obtain a driver's license.

Help Marylanders access and succeed in adult and post-secondary education.

Over 1.3 million working-age Marylanders lack a college degree and nearly one million are without a high school diploma. Projections show that the jobs of the future will require at least some education after high school. Despite this reality, many Marylanders continue to struggle to advance in post-secondary education and training. Without more affordable access to post-secondary education, employers will continue to struggle to fill positions.

Solutions

- Protect funding for adult education.
- Explore ways to improve student transition rates from developmental education into credit bearing courses.
- Work with the state to ensure that its collection of longitudinal data tracks students as they move from K-12, postsecondary, and into the workforce.

Protect Maryland's unemployment insurance program.

Unemployment insurance (UI) is a critical safety net for workers forced to leave their jobs involuntarily. Unfortunately, there are still many gaps in Maryland's UI safety net, and less than half of all unemployed workers receive benefits. Without adequate benefits, these workers and their families struggle to meet their basic needs as they seek new jobs, and the economy suffers as a result of lost revenue.

Solution

- Preserve Maryland's unemployment insurance system to ensure that out-of-work residents receive appropriate assistance.

Preserve the safety net for vulnerable Marylanders.

As more Marylanders are forced to turn to the state for assistance in meeting their basic needs during these difficult economic times, it is important to ensure that the state's safety net programs are protected. As legislators struggle to balance the budget, agencies serving the state's most vulnerable residents should be spared from harmful cuts.

Solutions

- Protect low-income residents from harmful budget cuts.
- Ensure that Maryland's stimulus money is spent effectively.

If you'd like information on how to get directly involved in supporting any of these initiatives, please contact Melissa Broome at 410-234-8046 or melissa@jotf.org.