

A NEW ROLE FOR AN OLD FRIEND

Diane Bell brings “energy and passion” to JOTF presidency

By Kevin Griffin Moreno

When asked about the major challenges facing Maryland's low-income workforce, JOTF's new president points to the mismatch between the skills of the labor force and the requirements of the state's growth industries.

“There is an increasing need to pay attention to helping existing low wage workers find opportunities that provide a greater career path, thus a growth in wages,” says Diane Bell. “At the same time, we as a region need to step up our funding and focus on connecting unemployed and challenged labor pool participants, like ex-offenders, to entry level work positions and to work experience opportunities.”

Such thoughtfulness is characteristic of the former Empower Baltimore Management Corporation CEO, who takes over as JOTF president in July. A respected leader in both the public and nonprofit sectors, Bell has acquired a reputation as someone capable of seeing diverse sides of an issue.

“One of the most valuable characteristics that Diane brings to JOTF is her ability to envision how the goals of business intersect with the needs of workers and communities,” says JOTF executive director Jason Perkins-Cohen.

Bell is no stranger to JOTF. She was a member of the original advisory committee that met in 1998 to plan JOTF's first job gap report, *Baltimore Area Jobs and Low-Skill Job Seekers: Assessing the Gaps*. Initially attracted to the organization by its broad scope and emphasis on community engagement, Bell became a charter member of the board of directors, and served as an officer from 2001-2004.

“As a board member, Diane makes sure we give attention to the workforce needs and perspectives of employers, to connecting economic development and workforce development, and to issues of race and employment,” says founding president Joanne Nathans, whose term expires at the end of June. “We are all delighted that Diane is the new president and we look forward to her leadership.”

Alleviating poverty and strengthening communities have been top priorities for Bell throughout her career.

After graduating from the University of Maryland with a degree in social work, she worked within the Washington, D.C. government to strengthen substance abuse treatment and child welfare programs. In 1988 she became head of Baltimore City's Office



New JOTF president
Diane Bell

of Children and Youth under Mayor Kurt Schmoke. Before taking the reins at EBMC, Bell served as deputy chief of staff and director of the city's public information office.

As CEO of Baltimore's Empowerment Zone, an ambitious urban revitalization initiative that was created in 1994 by a federal block grant of \$100 million, Bell made job creation, small business stimulation, and job seeker training major parts of the organization's work. Under her leadership, EBMC is credited with creating over 5,000 new jobs within the neighborhoods that comprise the Empowerment Zone.

Bell acknowledges that despite gains made in recent years for Maryland's working families, much work remains to be done.

“We need to reframe the conversation about workforce to talk more about creating and sustaining the middle class” she reflects. “Essentially that is what [JOTF is] seeking to do – create more of a middle class by increasing the wage growth opportunities for unemployed and underemployed persons,” particularly low-income people of color.

We need to reframe the conversation about workforce to talk more about creating and sustaining the middle class.

Part of that strategy involves the stimulation and growth of minority businesses. “If one accepts national research that successful minority businesses hire more people of color than non-minority businesses,” she asks, “shouldn't we be advocates for increasing the strength of those businesses?”

Bell feels strongly that the private sector as a whole plays an essential role in creating decent employment opportunities. One way to bring more employers to the table is for workforce development organizations to speak directly to the concerns of business.

“The nature of a market economy says that businesses must address their own self-interests to achieve their revenue goals,” she says. “We should not be fighting against this. In fact, we should embrace it as a chance to demonstrate to them how creating good job opportunities can also be good for business.”

She believes JOTF has the potential to lead the way in this effort by cultivating coalitions that include employers, business associations and trade groups, and community and regional economic development organizations.

The broad perspective Bell brings to her work will be an asset to JOTF in its ongoing efforts to build economic opportunities for working families in Maryland.

“We've all seen Diane's incredible effectiveness as head of EBMC, and in her earlier years of community service,” says Nathans. “As president of JOTF, Diane will bring energy and passion for improving economic opportunities for low-skill men and women.”



JOTF INVITES YOU TO A DEBATE:

Raising the Minimum Wage: Good for Maryland?



INVITED PRESENTERS:

Jeff Chapman, Economic Policy Institute
Tom Firey, Maryland Public Policy Institute

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22, 2005

8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Thumel Business Center Auditorium
Merrick School of Business

University of Baltimore

Corner of Charles Street and Mount Royal Avenue

Recent proposals to increase the minimum wage from the federally mandated \$5.15 per hour have sparked ardent advocacy on both sides of the issue. Join JOTF for a spirited debate on the merits and pitfalls of a minimum wage increase, and an examination of the impact such an increase might have on workers, businesses, and local economies.

Jeff Chapman is an economist with the Economic Policy Institute and a proponent of increasing the minimum wage. Tom Firey is a senior fellow with the MD Public Policy Institute and a policy staff member of the Cato Institute.

Space is limited. RSVP to Jessica Traskey at 410-234-8040, or send e-mail to jessica@jotf.org

SAVE THE DATE!

MEET OUR BOARD AND STAFF:

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Diane Bell
JOTF President

Patrice Cromwell
Annie E. Casey Foundation

Phil C. Holmes
Goodwill Industries of the Chesapeake

Steve Cole
Struever Bros., Eccles & Rouse

Kevin Jordan
Bon Secours Foundation

David Kandel
The Algebra Project

John Kortecamp
Home Builders Assoc. of MD

Constance Maddox
EBMC Advisory Council

Pat McLaughlin, SSND
Caroline Center

Irving McPhail
Community College of Baltimore County

Lynda Meade
Catholic Charities

Michael Mitchell
Chesapeake Habitat for Humanity

Ralph Moore, Jr.
St. Frances Academy Community Center

Molly Nash
St. Jude's Employment Academy

Joanne Nathans
JOTF

Pamela Paulk
Johns Hopkins Hospital

Marion Pines
JHU Institute for Policy Studies

Avis Ransom
Morgan State University

Don Scheeler
Catapult Learning

Melanie Styles
Abell Foundation

STAFF

Jason Perkins-Cohen, Executive Director

David Bosser, Policy Analyst

Phyllis Lewis, Business Liaison

Kevin Griffin Moreno,
Communications Director/Program Manager

Larry Schugam, Program Assistant

Jessica Traskey, Office Manager

IN THIS ISSUE:

JOTF Report from Annapolis, p.3

INVESTING IN MARYLAND'S WORKFORCE:

Pay Now or Feel the Pain Later

By Jason Perkins-Cohen

The state legislature made important strides for Maryland workers this session. Most notably, it increased adult education funding by \$1.2 million next year (\$1.5 in the two years following), passed a minimum wage increase, and enacted several laws that will help ex-offenders re-enter the workforce. These are significant accomplishments that will make a meaningful difference in the lives of many Marylanders. But these changes are merely a drop in the bucket.

No one can adequately live on minimum wage for full-time work.

Even with the increase in adult education funding, Maryland remains one of the least generous states in terms of its contribution to adult education. Governor Ehrlich vetoed legislation that would have increased the state minimum wage, leaving thousands of Maryland workers to live in poverty even as more and more states increase their own minimum wage levels. And ex-offenders continue to face significant barriers remain to entering the workforce.

Other issues were largely untouched by the legislature and the governor. For example, Maryland was unable to make any real progress in reducing the number of workers who have no health insurance or increasing the availability of child care.

No one will feel the pain of an unprepared workforce more than the business community. There is already an outcry from businesses that are unable to find the skilled workers they need. This problem is only going to get worse. A recent study found that the gap between the skills required for employment and the skills of the workforce is growing rapidly. If we are to avoid this looming crisis, we must begin to invest in our workforce now.

Fortunately, we know what the problems are, and we know what we must do to solve them:

- We know that a workforce in which nearly half its residents read below the 8th grade level will not be able to succeed in most occupations. So we must invest in education and training that will allow each individual to attain and maintain a quality job.

- We know that a no one can adequately live on \$10,000 a year (minimum wage for full-time work) so we must raise wages to a level that will result in each person staying on the job and having the resources to purchase vital goods and services for their families.

- We know that a parent can't go to work unless they have safe, affordable child care for their children. So we must devote the resources to ensure that the current 20,000 child waiting becomes an issue of the past not our present and future.

- We know that quality health care is essential to everyone. So we must devise a system that provides affordable medical coverage for all.

- We know that about 15,000 individuals leave prison every year. With little opportunity to enter the workforce, many of ex-offenders recidivate, diminishing the workforce and hurting themselves and their families. So we must reduce the barriers to work for ex-offenders and sponsor programs that help them re-enter society and the workforce.

Most people agree on the principles underlying these solutions. But when it comes time to make serious change, policymakers argue that funds are not available to make them happen. Yet every legislative session, laws are passed that fund pet projects and provide millions in tax breaks to corporations (this year the biotechnology sector reaped substantial public benefits).

Making a relatively small change like adding a million dollars to adult education is helpful, but it is only putting a bandage on a wound. We need to engage in an open and honest dialogue about the mismatch between available jobs and the current skills and supports for our workforce and make a commitment to invest the resources to wipe this mismatch away. Our future depends on it.



JOTF Executive Director Jason Perkins-Cohen

JOTF & PARTNERS SCORE WINS FOR WORKING FAMILIES

By Kevin Griffin Moreno

During the 2005 General Assembly session, JOTF and its advocacy partners made some significant gains on behalf of low-income workers and job seekers.

Adult Education

Adult Ed. waiting list: On May 10, Governor Ehrlich signed into law a bill allocating \$1.5 million per year to reduce the waiting list for adult education in FY 07 and FY 08. The legislation also requires the MD State Dept. of Education and the legislature to develop an ongoing funding formula for adult education.

Education budget: The state budget contains a recommendation from the legislature that \$1.2 M from the Cigarette Restitution Fund surplus be allocated in FY 2006 for adult education services, including basic literacy, GED preparation, and ESOL



Gov. Ehrlich signs bill that channels State Use Industries funds toward inmate rehab programs. Back row, l-r: Kevin Moreno; Rhea Harris, Dept. of Public Safety; Jeff Beeson, SUI Management Council; James Fielder, MD Secretary of Labor; Steve Shiloh, SUI; John Wafer, SUI Management Council. Front row, l-r: Lt. Gov. Michael Steele; Sen. President Mike Miller; Gov. Ehrlich; House Speaker Michael Busch. Photo courtesy of the Governor's Office.

Inmates & Ex-Offenders

Project RESTART: Although the legislature did not approve efforts to expand Project RESTART (Re-entry Enforcement Services Targeting Addiction, Rehabilitation, and Treatment) beyond the two institutions at which it is currently operating, the Department of Public Safety and MSDE were able to ease restrictions on funding for correctional education and occupational skills training.

State Use Industries (SUI, Maryland's prison industries division) put forth legislation that would have established a construction training program for inmates. The bill failed in committee.

Another bill, which was signed into law on April 26, commits \$250,000 per year in SUI funds to fund rehabilitation services for inmates.

Offender employment program: Legislation that would have reauthorized a state program to encourage employers to hire ex-offenders passed the Senate unanimously but failed in the House.

Food stamps access: Legislation that won approval from both the House and the Senate would lift the current state ban on food stamps for single individuals and non-custodial parents who have drug convictions. Removing the ban would make Maryland eligible for additional federal funding under the Food Stamps Employment and Training grant program. This legislation received support from the Ehrlich administration and is expected to be signed into law.*

Expungement – nuisance crimes: A bill introduced in the House would reduce employment barriers among Marylanders with criminal records by allowing them to apply for expungement of convictions for certain minor, non-violent “nuisance crimes” that are connected with extreme poverty. Currently no convictions can be removed from one's record in Maryland. This bill passed both chambers and awaits the governor's signature.*

Expungement – subsequent convictions: A second bill would have allowed people with convictions to apply for the removal of certain non-conviction items from their records, something that is currently not allowed. The bill passed the House of Delegates but failed in the Senate.

Employment Opportunities/Income Supports

Minimum Wage: JOTF supported efforts to increase the state minimum wage from the federally mandated \$5.15 per hour to \$6.15 per hour. The legislation passed both the House and Senate, and awaits the governor's signature.*

Child support arrearages: A bill that would have established an income tax credit for child support obligors failed in committee. The credit would have been limited to non-custodial parents who were employed and meeting their obligations to their children.

Unemployment Insurance: JOTF was instrumental in the passage of legislation that increases the monthly UI benefits for workers who lost their jobs through no fault of their own. JOTF was also named

to a state oversight commission that will examine further reforms to improve Maryland's UI system.

Childcare: Although legislation that would have provided additional funding for the state's Purchase of Childcare (POC) program failed, some gains were made in the budget process. Budget language stipulated that a certain percentage of money allocated for the POC program must go toward childcare vouchers, and cannot be used for other purposes.

Economic development: JOTF actively supported legislation that would have compelled the Department of Business and Economic Development to disclose information on the number and

quality of jobs created by public subsidies. The bill failed in committee.

Foreign-born workers: JOTF opposed two pieces of legislation that would have impeded workforce opportunities for new Marylanders. One bill, which was withdrawn by the sponsor, would have denied state public assistance to any non-U.S. citizen. Another bill, which was defeated in committee, would have created a task force to examine undocumented workers in Maryland's job market.

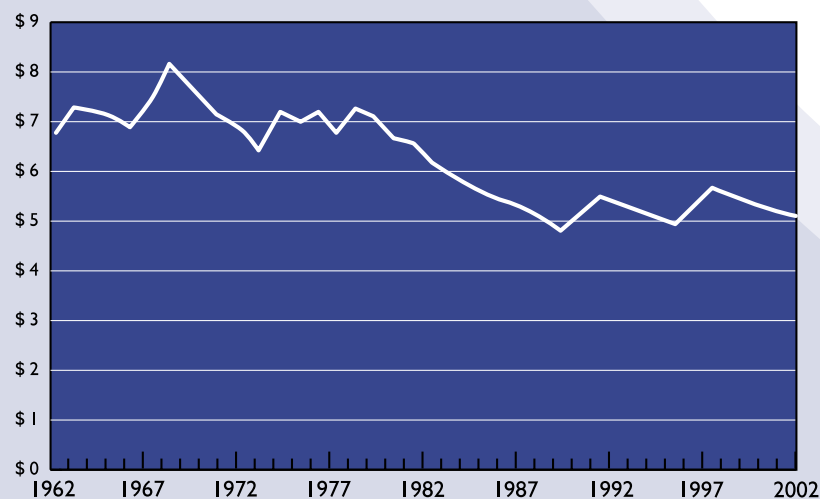
We would like to acknowledge the partners that joined us or led the way in fighting for low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers this session. Thanks to the Homeless Persons Representation Project, National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-MD, MD Alliance for the Poor, MD Justice Coalition, Greater Baltimore Committee, and all of the other organizations and individuals who advocate for improved economic opportunities for working families.

We are also grateful to the legislators who championed bills and budget measures supported by JOTF. Thanks go to Delegates Jill Carter, Kathleen Dumais, Keith Haynes, and Salima Marriott, and to Senators Nathaniel Exum, Patrick Hogan, and Verna Jones, among others.

For more information on JOTF's advocacy work during the 2005 session, visit <http://www.jotf.org/advocacy/annapolis.org> or contact Kevin Griffin Moreno at kevin@jotf.org or (410) 234-8046.

*As of press time.

Value of the Minimum Wage, 1962-2002 (in 2002 dollars)



Source: Economic Policy Institute (Inflation adjustments using the CPI-U)



NEW 'IN TIME OF NEED' DIRECTORY AVAILABLE!

By popular demand, JOTF has ordered another printing of 'In Time of Need,' our well-received catalog of community services.

Our updated directory contains valuable information on free and low-cost resources for low-income adults who are looking for help with childcare, health care, housing, transportation, and other areas.

Directories are available individually or in bulk for a cost of \$0.50 per copy. To order yours, send e-mail to info@jotf.org or call (410) 234-8046.