

FINDING A JOB, BUILDING A CAREER

By Deborah Povich, Executive Director



Labor market changes have contributed to the creation of concentrated unemployment and poverty. Baltimore City and several rural Maryland

counties have unemployment rates nearly two times the state average. But the official unemployment rate gives a false picture of the number of people without full employment because it ignores "discouraged workers," people who gave up looking for work, and those who took part-time jobs because no full-time

work was available. Low labor force participation strains public services, diminishes public coffers, and drains families and neighborhoods of economic vitality.

Economic restructuring has resulted in significant job losses in business sectors with jobs that require low education levels but pay family-supporting wages, like manufacturing. The Baltimore region's projected job openings through 2006 are predominately in low-skill, low-wage areas. These jobs won't meet the financial needs of our workforce.

By linking economic development and workforce programs, the state can help increase job opportunities, improve skills, and increase wages of underemployed and unemployed residents. It is time for government to take a proactive

approach to increasing employment.

To learn about the Ehrlich administration's plans to improve outcomes for low-wage, low-skill workers and job seekers, the Job Opportunities Task Force and the Open Society Institute – Baltimore sponsored a forum with the Secretaries of the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and Department of Labor Licensing and Regulations (DLLR). The Jacob France Institute of the University of Baltimore hosted the event.

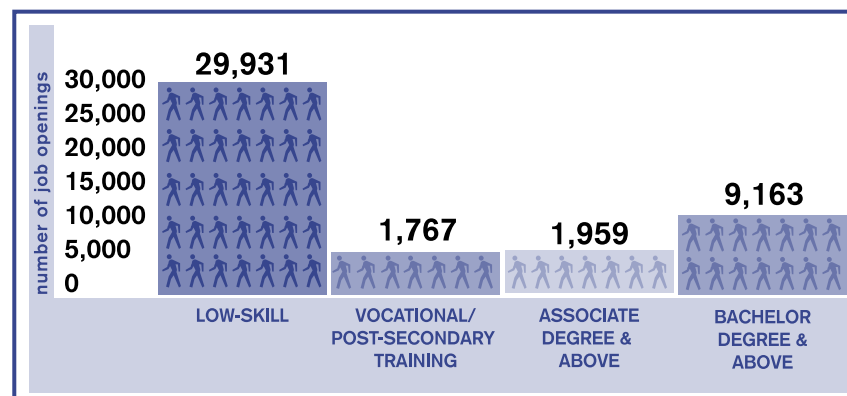
Moving People Into Jobs

DHR is responsible for assisting poor unemployed parents get jobs. To be successful, DHR's Secretary Christopher McCabe says the agency will work to remove barriers to employment so people can independently

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PROJECTED JOB OPENINGS WILL NOT MEET RESIDENT'S FINANCIAL NEEDS

Projected Baltimore Region Annual Job Openings Through 2006 by Type and Educational Level



Occupations requiring vocational/post-secondary training tend to offer stability, good wages, and benefits to workers at the lower end of the skills spectrum. However, these jobs account for the lowest projected number of regional job openings through 2006. The number of jobs at this skill level needs to be increased in order to improve economic opportunities for low-skill workers.

To order a copy of our 2003 report, Baltimore's Choice: Workers and Jobs for a Thriving Economy, call 410-234-8040

JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE WORKS, FALL 2003

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear JOTF Friend,

Welcome to the first JOTF print newsletter! Approximately four times a year it will bring you news of events and issues about jobs, skills, wages, the economy, and other topics relating to the low-skill, low-income workforce.

In this issue, JOTF Executive Director Deborah Povich discusses the role of state government in helping unemployed and underemployed job seekers and workers find jobs and advance in their careers. Kevin Moreno, Program Manager, spotlights Career Caravan, a reverse commute program that uses public and private support to provide Baltimore City job seekers with transportation to jobs in Howard County.

Who We Are

JOTF is an independent, nonprofit, broad-based network of service providers, employers, and community members in the Baltimore region.

Our purpose is to:

- Develop an accurate, realistic understanding of employment-related conditions and issues concerning low-skill workers and job seekers in the Baltimore metro area;

- Increase community awareness and discussion of employment issues; and
- Advocate policies and programs that increase the marketable skills, income, and economic opportunities of low-skill, low-income workers and job seekers.

JOTF began informally in 1996 after two knowledgeable community leaders gave opposite answers to the question of whether there were enough jobs in the Baltimore region to absorb the unemployed and underemployed populations. Beginning with a small group of concerned individuals, JOTF grew in numbers and in knowledge about poverty and unemployment issues. In 1999 we produced a 'job gap' report – the first for the Baltimore region – that identified the problems of many jobs with low wages, a workforce with low skill levels, shortages of skilled workers, and geographic distance between job seekers and many of the jobs. The need for action and long-term follow-up was the impetus for JOTF's formal incorporation in 2000.

Our Programs

Advocacy: JOTF's current advocacy priorities include providing skills training for low-skill workers, increasing funding for correctional education, and reducing barriers to employment of ex-prisoners.

Research: JOTF has published two reports, Baltimore's Choice: Workers and Jobs for a Thriving Economy (2003) and Baltimore Area Jobs and Low-Skill Job Seekers: Assessing the Gaps (1999).

As part of the multi-state Workforce Indicators Project, we are preparing a report that will examine the state conditions and policies that promote economic self-sufficiency for working low-wage families in Maryland.

Special Populations: Our primary focus is on employment challenges facing the approximately 15,000 inmates coming out of state correctional institutions each year. Barriers and deterrents include criminal records, child support arrearages that can be thousands of dollars, untreated substance addictions, and lack of job readiness or a marketable skill.

Cont'd inside

GETTING A RIDE TO WORK

By Kevin Griffin Moreno

Career Caravan uses public funds, nonprofit know-how, and employer engagement to close a regional transportation gap.



Leon Thomas, (Left) strikes a pose with employee Lenon Ford.

Leon Thomas knows a thing or two about hiring and keeping good people. As sales and marketing director of the Hilton Garden Inn in Columbia, Thomas spent five years of his extensive career in the hospitality industry teaching other hotel managers how to recruit and keep qualified employees.

"I worked with every type of hotel in every type of economy," says Thomas. He taught managers that if they wanted to improve employee performance and morale, they needed to communicate more effectively and place more trust in their employees' ability to perform well.

"Don't tell employees exactly how to do [a job]," he instructed the managers. Instead, "just tell them what needs to get done," and allow them to demonstrate their capabilities. As a result of his techniques, the hotels he worked with experienced dramatic increases in worker retention and job satisfaction.

So when Thomas was tapped to run the 98-room Hilton Garden Inn on Snowden River Parkway, one of his top priorities was attracting employees he could rely on to staff the recently opened hotel. Thomas found a resource in Career Caravan, a program that offers eligible Baltimore City residents free, round-trip van transportation on all shifts to Howard County jobs such as those available at the Hilton Garden Inn. The program fills a vital gap in a region where the scarcity of public transportation makes it difficult for job seekers from Baltimore to get to jobs in the surrounding counties, many of which clamor for entry-level employees.

"I spoke with Career Caravan in April," says Thomas. Within three months he had hired four employees to work in housekeeping and on the front desk. "We're really happy with them," he says. "When the opportunity comes up, we'd like to hire additional people" through the program. The four year-old Career Caravan is funded by an innovative public-private collaboration that includes

Baltimore City Department of Social Services (DSS), Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning, Maryland Transit Administration, and the U.S. Department of Transportation. Additional funding comes from the nonprofit BWI Business Partnership, an economic development consortium that manages Career Caravan. Originally limited to residents of Baltimore's Empowerment Zone, job seeker eligibility was expanded last year to include residents from all parts of the City. In order to ride, job seekers must be over 18 years of age and have received public assistance within the past year or be the parent of a child who receives public assistance.

Since June, JOTF has helped Career Caravan distribute announcements about positions in

"Workforce development is a team sport."

Howard County to area job developers who are members of the Baltimore Employment Roundtable, a workforce practitioner network convened by JOTF. Workforce agencies interested in putting their clients aboard the program's white vans must first participate in an orientation session. Once they are official Career Caravan partners, these agencies can begin referring clients. Vans collect workers from four pick-up points in West

Baltimore and transport them to jobs that pay at least \$8.00 per hour and offer benefits. Since its inception in 1999, Career Caravan has seen the numbers of riders and participating businesses triple. Today the vans ferry about 50 riders a day to jobs at over 20 Howard County companies.

One of these riders is Lenon "Lenny" Ford, a Southwest Baltimore resident whom Thomas hired as a houseman in July. Ford earns \$8.25 per hour setting up for special events, cleaning, and transforming the hotel's guest suites into sparkling showrooms that can be displayed for marketing and promotion purposes. He found out about Career Caravan at a job fair sponsored by Baltimore City DSS, where he was registered for employment assistance and other services. Ford admits that at first, he wasn't sure whether he should attend the job fair. "I had never been to one before," he says. "I didn't think it would work out."

Despite his doubts, he was determined to succeed. The custodial single father of a six-year-old, Ford was eager to re-enter the workforce after having been laid off from his previous job as a residential counselor. He appreciated the help he had received from DSS, such as child care assistance, but says that what he really wanted

was a demanding position where he could prove himself and advance in a career.

"I'd rather work hard," he says with a smile.

Ford feels that at the Hilton Garden Inn, he has found a challenge equal to his drive. Since he was hired in July, Ford has distinguished himself as a model employee with a shot at a management position.

"They're training me to work the front desk," he reports proudly.

According to Ben Cohen, who manages the van service, Ford's positive experience is an example of the success stories Career Caravan helps to create. Sitting in the BWI Business Partnership's Hanover office, he says that collaboration among employers, public agencies, nonprofits, and

workers is critical to building solutions that benefit everyone.

"Workforce development is a team sport," he says. Cohen believes that stakeholders in the workforce system must look beyond job placement and put a greater emphasis on job retention. He cites a marked increase in Career Caravan riders' job retention since the program began partnering with public and nonprofit service providers that continue to work with job seekers after they are placed in a position.



Ben Cohen Manages the Career Caravan Program

"There are an incredible amount of human resources in Baltimore City that can be used

for the economic betterment of the whole region," he says, but only if all the players work together toward positive outcomes for all. Committed collaboration "is to everyone's benefit." Leon Thomas agrees. He applauds workforce development programs for helping job seekers develop "a sense of pride, a sense of responsibility." And he feels that employers can contribute by equipping job seekers with real-life work skills that supplement the education and vocational training they receive from service providers. Thomas' positive experience with Ford makes him optimistic about continuing to work with Career Caravan. He believes that if more public agencies, nonprofits, and businesses work together to train and support dedicated workers, the number of success stories like Lenny Ford's will increase.

"We'll all win," asserts Thomas.

FINDING A JOB cont'd:

support themselves. These barriers include the need for addiction treatment, childcare, and transportation.

But reducing barriers costs money. Because of budget cuts, DHR recently reduced funding for childcare assistance for low-income parents. New applicants for Purchase of Childcare (POC) subsidies are being placed on a waiting list. Since

January over 9,000 children from working poor families have been put on the childcare waiting list. Although Temporary Cash

Assistance (TCA) clients continue to get childcare vouchers, the reduction in funding for POC will hinder employment prospects for many low-wage parents.

Following national trends, DHR is emphasizing personal responsibility and requiring clients seeking cash assistance to engage in work activities from day one of eligibility. Since welfare reform legislation was approved in 1996, the number of TCA cases in Maryland has decreased 68 percent. DHR's emphasis now moves from case reduction to getting clients into a countable work activity. What counts? DHR recently changed the guidelines of

what constitutes a "work activity" and removed post-secondary education from the list of eligible activities for the first 30 hours of the work requirement.

In a job-loss recovery where competition for work is fierce, the questions are: Will TCA clients get jobs in high unemployment areas? How much will those jobs pay? How will workers move from jobs to careers?

It is time for government to take a proactive approach to increasing employment.

Incumbent Worker Training

DLLR's Secretary James Fielder believes workforce development is economic development. Upgrading skills is an important step for entry-level workers. Fielder will work to increase resources for incumbent worker training by approaching the federal government for additional funding. "People need to have careers, not just jobs," Fielder said. Education and training programs need to be linked to develop the skills needed for jobs in sectors with labor shortages.

DLLR recently unveiled a new training program using \$1 million of an incentive grant that

Maryland received from the federal government for meeting or exceeding the Workforce Investment Act goals. Maryland Business Works, an incumbent worker training program, will require a dollar for dollar match from employers.

Funds will be allocated to the 12 local workforce investment areas where businesses can apply.

Maryland Business Works is designed to increase employment stability, promote career growth, and increase wages for workers through training in transferable skills or an industry-recognized certification or credential program. Increasing resources for

incumbent worker training is one action government can take to upgrade workers skills.

Coordinating Services to Improve Outcomes

A tremendous opportunity exists for state agencies to coordinate efforts on job placement and skills training. By acquiring the skills needed in the work place, people who are out of work or underemployed can find jobs that pay family supporting wages. We hope DHR and DLLR will collaborate to improve employment opportunities for low wage residents, both job seekers and the working poor.



AM I ELIGIBLE?

A new feature on the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) website offers information on eligibility for work supports such as Temporary Cash Assistance and Food Stamps.

JOTF spearheaded efforts with other advocacy groups to encourage DHR to increase access and outreach to clients who are eligible for work supports. Local departments of social services are the points of entry for clients seeking economic assistance. Responding to our work, DHR recently revised its website to provide information on client eligibility. Go to www.dhr.state.md.us, click on "Do You Need Our Help With a Specific Problem or Concern?" then "Am I Eligible?" Users can then determine what programs clients may or may not be eligible for. DHR continues to work with the advocacy community to increase access and outreach with no new state funding.

FROM THE PRESIDENT cont'd:

Employer Engagement: The employers on our Board of Directors provide an important perspective, and our newly formed Employer Advisory Committee is developing strategies to improve results for employers who have difficulties finding and keeping skilled workers, and for job seekers who are not successful in finding and keeping jobs.

Capacity Building: JOTF convenes the Baltimore Employment Roundtable, a network of job developers, retention specialists, and other workforce practitioners who meet monthly to share information and engage in professional development activities.

Public Forums: Six times a year, we convene public meetings to raise awareness and spur discussion and action around key local and national workforce issues.

Partnerships and Other Initiatives: JOTF is a member of the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board, the Maryland Unemployment Insurance Funding Task Force, the Maryland Alliance for the Poor, Maryland Justice Coalition, Baltimore City Ex-Offender Task Force, and the Baltimore Transitional Jobs Project for Ex-Offenders, and we participated in the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, a national

campaign for the rights of foreign-born workers. We are beginning to explore issues of race and employment.

For additional information, a calendar of events, and publications, please visit our website, www.jotf.org. We hope you will continue to find this newsletter a useful source of ideas and information. Your comments and questions are always welcome.

Sincerely,
Joanne Nathans,
President

