



Testimony of New York Association of Training & Employment Professionals
Before the State Senate Civil Service and Pension & Higher Education
Committee on February 21, 2020

Presented by Melinda Mack, Executive Director

My name is Melinda Mack. I am the Executive Director of the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP), also known as New York State's workforce association. Our 175 member organizations are deeply committed to workforce development as economic development and serve well over a million New Yorkers each year. Founded in the late 1970's, our association represents every county in the State, and includes workforce boards, providers of economic development, unions, colleges, literacy, education, job training, and employment services. Our members range from small community-based organizations that work within neighborhoods or with special populations, such as veterans, youth, or New Yorkers with criminal justice histories, to huge institutions such as the state college and university system.

We are in the tightest labor market in decades, and I am sure as you speak to businesses in your district, they lament their challenges finding employees. This extends to local and state government as well, which in some communities make up a large share of regional employment. Any shortage of labor directly impedes our state's ability to attract employers, hinders business productivity and economic growth potential. In our 2019 State of the Workforce report, we indicated that nearly 29% of government workforce across New York State is nearing retirement age. This means government, like all sectors of the economy need to think differently about recruitment, retention and career pathway development in order to compete.

There are three key strategies that governments can utilize to attract and retain talent, which is the same advice we would provide to employers struggling to recruit:

- Become an "employer of choice"
- Create and fund career pathways
- Adapt the recruitment pipelines

Become an "employer of choice"

As in the private sector, when you are competing for talent, you must be able to differentiate why you are an "employer of choice", meaning places people seek out and choose to work. Key factors in becoming an employer of choice include, salary, benefits and workplace culture. The concept of public service aligns deeply with the values asserted by the surveys we have recently seen about millennials and generation Z. In general, they care deeply about the value of their work, desire to see their ideas contribute to the outcomes of the organization they work for and seek income stability. The State has a significant opportunity to reset the communication about the role of public service, the important contributions, but also the employee benefits that come along with the job.

Depending on role, the process for government positions often requires a cumbersome civil service process and or provisional appointments, leaving many candidates in limbo or taking jobs that do not align with the civil service exams they are being asked to take. If this is your first employment experience, it doesn't leave a good impression. In New York, NYATEP's State of the Workforce report shows that the largest proportion of workers in the gig economy are young adults. This is an opportunity to transition the skills they are learning to government work. In state's like Michigan, they are rethinking the minimum qualifications, and providing "earn and learn" options for government employees to access initial employment, and then provide advancement opportunities as they earn their postsecondary credentials. It is allowing Michigan to reach a wider set of potential candidates and communicate up front how an employee can grow their career in government employment. New York could adapt the minimum qualifications to better reflect work experience vs educational attainment.

Although public sector benefits are often far more robust than the private sector, innovative governments are considering expansion of Employee Assistance Programs, including mental health support and counseling, legal services, among others. Per Governing magazine, investment in leadership development, particularly in a civil service setting, and development of competitive time and leave policies to better align with private sector expectations are strategies government is exploring.

Create and fund career pathways

The best way to spread the word about the incredible opportunities available in government is exposure to the job opportunities. We strongly encourage the state to consider more direct engagement with postsecondary institutions, including 2-year, 4-year and vocational training programs. This engagement should include the development of a range of work-experience programs to expose students (young adults and adults) to careers in government. This can range from on-the-job training programs, including internships, fellowships, and job shadowing programs. For example, in Germany, all young adults are required to complete several job shadowing experiences to learn about local employers and career opportunities.

In Colorado, they are taking a page from the Swiss model, combining rigorous education for juniors and seniors in high school, and combining on-the-job training and work experience into a youth apprenticeship model. The Colorado Careerwise model is proving successful in attaching employers to talent and providing young adults with access to pathways that align with their educational passion, credentials and ultimately a job. In New York, the Here to Here program is looking to further expand this model of youth apprenticeship.

It is important to note that apprenticeship does not need to be constrained to high school-aged youth. There is significant opportunity to expand apprenticeship pathways into competitive, high demand occupations within government like IT, administrative positions or maintenance and labor. New York has underscored its desire to be a national apprenticeship leader, and it could and should lead in development government apprenticeship pathways.

Adapt the recruitment pipeline

Across New York State, we are leaving potential talent behind, due to lack of investment or consideration for employment opportunities. In our State of the Workforce Report, we indicated that 42% of New Yorkers have a high school diploma or less, making many government jobs outside of their reach. Additionally, individuals with disabilities, immigrants, and the formerly incarcerated, are among others who are an opportunity away from good job.

In the City of Los Angeles, utilizing federal workforce development funding and city and county tax levy, the LA: Rise initiative was created to develop a pathway from unemployment, to transitional employment to permanent work in the private and public sector. The intention is to support the transition of low wage or underskilled workers into good or better jobs in the public sector, specifically targeting homeless individuals, formerly incarcerated, veterans, individuals with disabilities and young adults. The public sector program, called Targeted Local Hire Program, works with social enterprises/community-based partners to provide transitional employment, and work readiness skills. Then, candidates can apply for two career pathways in local government, Office Trainee (Office Services assistant and Administrative Clerk) and Vocational Worker (Gardener, Tree Surgeon, Custodian, Garage Attendant, and Maintenance Laborer). Working with Civil Service to design the program, it circumvents some civil service requirements with supplemental on-the-job training that lasts for one year. Government jobs provide consistent income, hours and often enviable benefits, bringing much needed stability to the city's most vulnerable. Over 500 individuals have taken part in the initial trainee program, with over half transitioning to full time city government positions. There is no reason this program couldn't be replicated in New York State.

I sincerely appreciate your continued support and interest in job training, education and employment, and your deep understanding of the needs of your constituents. I would be happy to take your questions or to follow up with your staff following the Hearing. If you have any questions or comments relating to this testimony or any of the reports below, please reach out to Melinda Mack at mmack@nyatep.org or (518) 545 – 9500.

2020 State of the Workforce: Executive Summary

The State of the Workforce Brief is an annual snapshot, of publicly available data, to inform communities about the dynamics of their regional economy and the workforce impact. The New York Association of Training & Employment Professionals embarked on this project to use readily available data to understand who is working and who isn't; what sectors and occupations are growing across the State; and the number of potential workers produced by New York's education & training systems.

Changing economic landscape in New York and United States

- Statewide the official unemployment rate is 4.2%, but if discouraged, marginally attached, and workers who are part-time for economic reasons are included, the unemployment rate is 7.6%.
- The economy is showing indications of a slowdown. Workforce professionals should stay alert to indicators like the quits rate, shift to part-time employment, auto sales, and multiple jobs per person.
- The youth unemployment rate remains high at 20.7% for ages 16 to 19 and 11.6% for ages 20 to 24. Youth participation in the gig economy is high, with 38% of those ages 18 to 24 working in the gig economy nationwide.
- Low-wage jobs continue to dominate New York's labor market; of the top 10 occupations that make up over 1.7 million jobs, nine out of ten pay less than \$32,000 per year.
- Clean and green jobs continue to grow across New York State, while 80% of employers in the past year had difficulty hiring, with incoming talent lacking experience, training, or technical skills, as well as industry-specific knowledge.

Childcare is a barrier to median and low-wage families

- The cost of childcare has surpassed housing as the most expensive category of basic living, creating a significant barrier for families. Infant care for one child would consume 22.1% of a median family's income.
- Childcare access continues to be a struggle with only 9.1% of childcare programs offering non-traditional hours (evening, overnight or weekend hours).
- Childcare workers also struggle to get by. According to the Early Care and Learning Council, 70% of childcare providers report working a second job to make ends meet. Additionally, 65% of New York childcare worker families are participating in at least one public income support or health care program (EITC, Medicaid and CHIP, SNAP and/or TANF).

Costs facing New York's workforce

- More than 40% of hourly employees get no more than seven days' notice about their upcoming schedules and 28% get three days or fewer. This unpredictability can decrease an individual's family stability and quality of life.
- About 40% of individuals reporting family incomes between \$15,000 - \$30,000 report being either unbanked or "underbanked," meaning they also rely on an alternative financial service.
- The average annual cost of not having a bank account is \$196.50 for people who use a prepaid debit card that features direct deposit. That figure jumps to \$497.33 if the card doesn't offer direct deposit, creating an adverse effect for low-income families.