

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY

Rapid Workforce Training and Redeployment Initiative Good for Business and Workers

BY JAMES DECHENE AND VERITY WATSON

LAST SUMMER the State Chamber started developing the narrative around the increased need for a workforce retraining program to help better position Delawareans to be active participants in our changing economy.

Much like the successful Zip Code Wilmington – a time compressed, 40-hour a week curriculum focused on in-demand skills resulting in successful job placement for those who complete the program – the State Chamber searched for partners and, with the help of members, a focus on which industries could support a similar approach to training.

The top three industry sectors identified were information technology, health care, and pre-apprentice level construction. Fast forward to the summer of 2020 when Governor Carney issued an executive order formalizing this significant step forward. This collaboration with the Delaware Department of Labor will identify and create these training programs and fund the tuition for participants so that Delawareans can immerse themselves in learning the skills they need for a successful career.

The Rapid Workforce Training and Redeployment Initiative authorizes the Delaware Department of Labor to create these training programs and utilizes funds from the CARES Act, a piece of federal legislation designed to help states with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of the year, qualified participants will have the opportunity to enroll into certificate programs and have access to the TRAIN program (Today's Reinvestment Around Industry Needs). The criteria for programs to be included in this initiative include:

- A relationship between the certificate program curriculum and skill requirements of employers in the state
- Evidence of the skill needs of an in-demand industry sector or occupation in the state
- Assurances from employers of an intent to hire an individual after completion of a program
- The ability to deliver a quality program on an expedited basis
- Job placement rate experience for graduates of the program provider

The creation of these training programs, especially during this period of uncertainty, is timely and welcome, and a shift toward the training models of the future. With the expressed goal of retraining the record-breaking number of workers displaced due to the economic impact of the pandemic, many Delawareans will be better positioned toward obtaining a career with



growth potential. This is a win-win for Delaware. For example, the heavy highway construction field was having difficulty filling well paid, benefit rich positions before the pandemic. The State has a unique opportunity to support Delawareans with quality training while ramping up infrastructure investment to help get Delaware back on track post COVID-19.

The Delaware State Chamber of Commerce looks forward to working with our members, the Delaware Workforce Development Board, the Delaware Department of Labor, and curriculum providers to provide feedback on what skills are most needed, and to line up employers looking for qualified candidates post-certification. It is said necessity is the mother of invention, and in this case has provided a timely partnership we look forward to fostering now and into the future.



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