

Workforce³One

Transcript of Webinar

Wagner-Peyser Employment Services and Unemployment Insurance

*Transcript By
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Hello, and thanks for tuning in to today's training about Wagner-Peyser employment services and unemployment insurance. Our speaker will be Gay Gilbert, administrator for the Office of Unemployment Insurance at the Employment and Training Administration at the United States Department of Labor.

GAY GILBERT: Hello, everyone. I'm here today to talk with you about the changes made in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to the Wagner-Peyser Act, which is the authorizing legislation for the employment service, which is currently delivered through our One-Stop systems nationwide. Under the Opportunity Act, there are a few key changes.

First of all, it is one of four core programs that are required to be included as part of a unified state plan. That makes it front and center as one of the key services that has to be integrated through our One-Stop systems.

The Opportunity Act also required that the employment services be co-located in the One-Stop centers. So the physical One-Stop center that must be in every local area and/or centers must include the employment service, that it is not feasible as it was under the Workforce Investment Act to actually have a standalone office that was an affiliate site. So it must be co-located.

As under the Workforce Investment Act, the Opportunity Act also applies the common core performance measures to the Wagner-Peyser Act employment services. So that includes entered employment, retention and earnings, as well as now the new measures – and, by the way, these measures may have slightly new definitions now, and that will be changing slightly – but also there's the new measures around credentials attainment when there's -- particularly when there's training.

I would also like to note one of the new changes for the employment service is the Wagner-Peyser Act provides for 10 percent set aside for governors to focus on targeted activities. One of those new targeted activities is to focus on staff development, so that we ensure that the individuals delivering services through the One-Stops are adequately trained and really can provide quality reemployment services.

Another change, at least in the words in the statute, for the Wagner-Peyser Act, is that there's now a very clear targeting of unemployment insurance claimants as a key population to serve. While these two programs grew up together, the employment service was seen as a – as a program designed to help UI claimants get back to work quickly. Over time, it's also been considered a universal program, where – to provide services to everybody. The Opportunity Act now kind of hones back in and really focuses on UI claimants as a core population to be served.

It also allows for some new activities to be carried out using Wagner-Peyser funds. It allows for claimants to receive eligibility assessments. It also strongly encourages referrals, where appropriate, to training and education opportunities. And also new in the unemployment insurance world is that claimants must receive assistance in filing UI claims when needed at the One-Stop Career Centers, and that's a new requirement as a career service to be available. And again, Wagner-Peyser staff could potentially be the deliverer of that assistance.

I mentioned earlier that the Wagner-Peyser Act employment services are a core program under the Opportunity Act, and that as such they have to be part of the unified state plan. There is also a focus in the local planning requirements under the Opportunity Act that local boards focus on how connections will be made and services strengthened with regard to unemployment insurance claimants.

So how are we going to improve the connectivity, particularly given that claimants traditionally file remotely? How do we get them into our One-Stop centers and make those connections for reemployment services in the most effective way? So local plans now must include that kind of information.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act also is very, very focused on performance accountability and data-driven service delivery, and there are a number of ways that the Act hones in on these two areas.

First of all, the unified state plans require that – a big focus on how are we going, as a system, to integrate our data systems and our information technology systems and infrastructure in ways that improve service delivery, that enable our performance accountability, and ensure that we're providing integrated services to our customers. And obviously, now with new partners in the Opportunity Act, including TANF and SNAP and others, obviously how we do that with these new

partners and not just inside the Department of Labor-funded programs is also very critical.

As under the Workforce Innovation Act, labor market and workforce information is a big focal point, and there were some changes to Section 15 of the Wagner-Peyser Act that describes what that workforce information and labor market information system should focus on and how it should be structured for continuous improvement. Again, it is intended to be a really important foundational component as we look to the workforce strategies we're delivering through our system, how we think about demand occupations and industries, how we focus our sector strategies, how we look at our regional economies and develop our service delivery strategies and the like. So labor market and workforce information continues to be very much a critical service component and a system component under the Opportunity Act.

It also envisions a new process and entity to help support continuous improvement for the labor market and workforce information system, and by bringing together in collaboration across our federal agencies and states and a new Workforce Information Advisory Council. I want to talk just a little bit more about that here in a minute, but before I leave this slide on performance accountability, I want to focus in for a minute on another unemployment insurance issue related to the Opportunity Act and how it supports performance.

Wage records are a key, fundamental tool to help support how we measure performance in our system. That's how we know people have gone to work and we know what kinds of wages they're making. So wage records, there's a huge increase in the demand for wage records under the Opportunity Act. So for more programs that will need them, there's a new enhanced focus on the eligible training provider list. And we would anticipate that there may be a need for new infrastructure to help those training providers get access to at least aggregate workforce – or wage-record data to measure their performance and be able to report in the way they're required to under the Act. So we will be working with our partners and with states, and state UI agencies in particular, about how we will manage this new demand for wage-record data over time.

And finally, I wanted to come back to the new Workforce Information Advisory Council. Many of you may remember that we – under the Workforce Investment Act, we have something called the WIC, the Workforce Information Council. It

was structured under the leadership of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It was made up primarily of 10 labor market information directors that were selected by the states. The structure for this new Workforce Information Advisory Council is a bit different. I have heard from the Bureau of Labor Statistics that there is a plan to sort of maintain a body that's similar to the current WIC because it focuses in on many of the BLS programs and how they're operated. However, the new Workforce Information Advisory Council now will have a much broader group of people on it. It'll include state administrators, workforce administrators. It will still have some labor market information directors, as well as representatives from local boards, employers, educators and economic developers.

And the goal with this new entity, I think, is to provide a much more robust input with regard to what are the needs in our workforce information and labor market information system; how can we improve the tools and products and data that drives our system, both the accountability and the service delivery pieces of our system. And so it's intended to be a much more robust body. And there is clear language in the Opportunity Act that suggests that the secretary of Labor is to work collaboratively with this group to continuously improve our workforce information and labor market information system.

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