

Minutes of the Hawai'i County Workforce Development Board (HCWDB) Meeting

Date: Wednesday, November 12th, 2025

Time: 9:07 am

Location: Interactive Conference Technology (Zoom/In-person combination)

Chair: Rossella Guardascione

1. Call to Order and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 9:07 am

New Board Members/Guests Welcomed:

- Jodie Sumera was welcomed as a new board member, replacing Brian Penner. Ms. Sumera is the Hawaii Island Division Chief with HGEA.
- Sylvia Wan (Corporation Counsel) was welcomed, offering legal guidance throughout the meeting.

2. Roll Call and Determination of Quorum

- Roll call was conducted. Board members were reminded that cameras must be on to constitute presence for the purposes of quorum.
- Attendees Present (10 members): Austen Drake, Dawn Hao-De Motta, Denise Pacheco, Jeracah Lawless, Jodie Sumera, Juanita Reyher-Colon, Les Estrella, Rossella Guardascione, Susan Kazama, Trisha Buskirk.
 - Attendees Excused: Chad Okinaka, David Deluz Jr, Kehau Costa.
 - Quorum Status: Quorum was achieved with 10 board members present.

3. Call for Public Comments on Agenda Items

- No public testimony or comments were presented for items on the agenda.

4. Approval of Minutes

- The Board reviewed and discussed the minutes from the last meeting held on Thursday, March 27th.
 - Motion to Approve: Denise Pacheco.
 - Second: Juanita Reyher-Colon
 - Discussion: None noted.
 - Voting Procedure: Corporation Counsel (Sylvia) advised that because the item concerned minutes and was expected to be unanimous, the Board could take a verbal vote, adhering to Robert's Rules interpretations.
 - Vote Result: Motion passed unanimously by verbal vote ("I" by all in favor; no nays).

5. Introduction of Changemakers Community Economic Development Corporation (One-Stop Operator - OSO)

- Christian McAdams, Executive Director of Changemakers Community Economic Development Corporation, provided an introduction. Changemakers was selected as the one-stop shop operator (OSO) for the American Job Center Hawaii (AJCH).
 - Background: The organization was founded in 2021 with a focus on increasing economic equity and justice in Hawai'i through education programs.
 - Designation: Changemakers is a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), which allows them to make loans. The OSO role marks a new focus on workforce development.
 - Implementation: Changemakers won the RFP and began work in early October.

6. New Business

- 6A. Recommendation for approval of extension for the WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth program for Program Year 2024
 - The item was presented by Denise Pacheco (Chair of the Oversight Committee).
 - Oversight Committee Review: The Committee met on June 12th, reviewed provider performance, monitoring evaluations, outreach efforts, and unanimously recommended approval for the extension of the adult, dislocated, and youth programs for the next year. Goodwill Industries provided specific reports detailing steps and strategies moving forward.
 - Sunshine Law/Robert's Rules Guidance (Action Deferred): Corporation Counsel (Sylvia) advised the Board that while the County had already renewed the contract with Goodwill (effective 7/1/25 for PY 24), the Board itself must vote on the recommendation on a separate day. This delay is required under Sunshine Law to ensure all members have sufficient time with the recommendations and make an informed decision. If the Board decides against approval, corrective actions and reasons must be provided.
- **6B. Executive Director's Update (Clinton Mercado)**
 - One-Stop Operator Status: The selection of Changemakers resolves a potential firewall violation by removing the County (R&D) from the operational role while still maintaining oversight, potentially making

the HCWDB the first in the state to have a non-government one-stop operator.

- WIOA Funding Update (PY 25: 7/1/26 - 6/30/27): Due to federal uncertainty, the initial allocation of \$1,229,687 was revised down to only 46%, totaling \$652,448. This leaves a shortfall of \$777,239.
- Fiscal Measures: The County proactively initiated a B-52 appropriation of \$1.4 million with the County Council to minimize contract delays when the rest of the funds are released.
- Program Outlook: Although money was returned in PY 23, the high demand for services in PY 24 is anticipated to cause the adult program to run into a negative balance soon. Goodwill's current funds extend through 6/30/26.
- County Hiring Policy: The Mayor supports removing the minimum one-year qualification requirement for many entry-level county jobs to allow Hawai'i County to provide this experience to local residents.
- Outreach: Staff has engaged in community events, including a youth job challenge academy, the Hilo senior resource fair (for kūpuna), the Hawaii Island Sustainability Fair, and the early childhood education fair.

7. Motion (Amended Agenda Item): A motion was proposed to amend the agenda to include an item tasking the Business and Engagement Committee with duties and issuing a call for new members.

- Motion to Amend: Denise Pacheco.
- Second to Amend: Juanita Reyher-Colon.
- Vote on Amendment: Passed unanimously by verbal vote ("Eyes have it").
 - Result: 10 to 0. Motion approved.
 - Volunteer: Trisha volunteered for the Business Engagement Committee.

8. Partner Updates

- 7A/B. American Job Center Hawaii (AJCH) Update (Jeracah Lawless)
 - Visitors: The AJCH recorded a total of 1,698 visitors during the previous two quarters (April through September).
 - Customer Complaint: The main complaint is that the center is difficult to locate because it is situated on the second floor. Staff is working to secure better, road-facing signage.
 - Technology: The AJCH recently upgraded its copper phone lines to a VOIP system.

- Industry Collaboration: Jodie Sumera volunteered to invite the HCWDB to attend the Big Island Labor Alliance meetings to discuss industry matters with union representatives.
- Updates from Additional Partners
 - Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, Workforce Development Division (Denise Pacheco): Highlighted the successful Helmo program, which provided statewide summer internships at a livable wage (\$20 per hour). DLIR serves recent graduates (high school through college) with the goal of retaining them on island. The AJCH serves various populations, including kūpuna (older Americans), youth, under/unemployed, veterans, and justice-impacted individuals.
 - Economic Updates (Benson Medina, Director of Research and Development): The ongoing cesspool mitigation effort represents an estimated \$2 billion industry on the island (50,000 cesspools need mitigation) and requires training in trades like backhoe operation. International tourism trends suggest growing interest from Korea, with potential planning for a direct flight from Incheon, Seoul to Kona. Discussions are also underway with Southwest Airlines to pitch a non-stop daily flight from Hilo to Las Vegas. The aquaculture industry (with NELHA noted as the "Silicon Valley of aquaculture") shows high potential for workforce development. Film production has surged, with Netflix planning to film a series (Untamed) at Hawai'i National Park starting in February.
 - Goodwill Industries of Hawaii (Emily Lau, VP Mission Services): Announced that the VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) clinic has received confirmation that its federal funding will continue for the following year, and put out a call for volunteers.

9. Adjournment

- Clinton Mercado offered thanks for the collective hard work throughout 2025 and wished everyone a joyous holiday season.