



NCWorks Commission Quarterly Business Session

Wednesday, August 13, 2025

NC State University McKimmon Center, Raleigh, N.C.

1:00 P.M. – 2:00 P.M. | Webinar

MINUTES

Present:

Chair Tom Rabon, Chris Arabia, Daniel Briggs, Shawn Brown, Sherry Carpenter, Rodney Carson, Wesley Davis, Secretary Lee Lilley/Andrea DeSantis, Kindl Detar (*Governor Josh Stein*), Robert Doreau, Secretary Gabriel Esparza/Candace Lowry, Chris Egan (*Secretary Devdutta Sangvai*), Jeffrey Frederick, Jim Hartman, Byron Hicks (*President Peter Hans*), Steven Hunt, Suzanne Johnson, Paul Lawler, John Loyack (*President Jeff Cox*), Marti Martin Mathews, Darla McGlamery, Nikki Nissen, Olalah Njenga, Sharene Pierce, Cheryl Richards, Mark Richardson, Tammy Simmons, Cynthia Speight, Gregory Thompson, Kim Toler, Pam Townsend, Robert Van Dyke, Hope Williams, Annie Izod

Absent:

Rebecca Axford, Christopher Gergen, Himanshu Karvir, Superintendent Mo Green

Welcome

Chair Rabon opened the NCWorks Commission's business session with a warm welcome, expressing his pleasure at gathering once again at North Carolina State University's McKimmon Center in Raleigh. He noted how good it felt to return to this familiar venue as the commission came together for its summer quarterly meeting.

Opening Remarks by Secretary Lee Lilley

Chair Rabon introduced Lee Lilley as North Carolina's new Secretary of Commerce, appointed by Governor Josh Stein and taking office on January 1, 2025. Bringing extensive economic development experience, Secretary Lilley most recently served as Director of Economic and Pandemic Recovery for Governor Roy Cooper, overseeing statewide recovery efforts, acting as state infrastructure coordinator, leading economic development initiatives, and advising on strategy and communications. He joined the Governor's Office in 2018 as Director of Legislative Affairs, managing all executive engagement with the General Assembly and guiding policy and legislative strategy. Earlier, as Senior Vice President and Deputy Director of Federal Practice at McGuireWoods Consulting in Washington, D.C., he represented a broad range of clients—from Fortune 500 companies to nonprofits—before Congress and federal agencies.

Secretary Lilley opened by thanking the chair, staff, and partners whose work keeps the state ranked as the nation's top place for business, for three out of four previous years according to CNBC. He expressed pride in his role promoting the state, calling it the best job in government, and noted that Governor Stein, early in his tenure, created the Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships to ensure North Carolina has the most competitive, best-trained workforce in America. As co-chair alongside other state leaders, Secretary Lilley described how the council developed 11 measurable, time-limited goals to be achieved within four years, he emphasized that progress must be tracked because "we can't improve

what we can't measure," and explained that the next phase is implementing strategies to achieve these goals. Secretary Lilley stated that workforce development is a team effort requiring strong coordination among the council, the commission, NCWorks, and multiple state departments.

Secretary Lilley thanked Governor Stein for making early childhood education and childcare a core priority, noting an early executive order that created a Task Force on Child Care and Early Education. He emphasized that, while he doesn't co-chair this group, it is led by two strong chairs— Lieutenant Governor Rachel Hunt and Senator Jim Burgin—and that the Department of Commerce, its policy team, and the early childhood business unit are helping staff its work. The task force is tackling workforce barriers, especially the lack of affordable, high-quality childcare—an issue statewide, not just in rural areas. The goals are to expand early learning that improves children's outcomes, give parents secure and reliable care so they can work or study with confidence, and help employers by reducing disruptions—all contributing to a stronger economy—and he expressed gratitude for the governor's leadership.

Secretary Lilley noted that reports from both the Workforce and Apprenticeships Council and the Child Care and Early Education Task Force are available on the commerce website and will be shared with the commission, with more work ahead. He announced the launch of a new four-year economic development plan, building on the previous "First in Talent" strategy led by his predecessor, whom he praised for a strong transition and durable processes. He stressed these plans are actionable, not shelfware, citing that about 84 percent of First in Talent's metrics have been met, and said the new plan will update, right-size, and expand that foundation to reflect how much has changed over the last three years. To shape the strategy, commerce is partnering with the UNC School of Government on a statewide listening tour starting August 27th, with eight in-person sessions plus a statewide online session, to gather input on how to focus resources so North Carolina remains the best state for business and workers.

Secretary Lilley announced a leadership change in the Department of Commerce, praising outgoing Chief Deputy Jordan Ward and welcoming Kenny Flowers, formerly assistant secretary for rural economic development, to the role. He then turned to a major ongoing priority: Hurricane Helene recovery, the costliest natural disaster in state history, with estimated damages of \$60 billion. At the governor's request, the department took on managing the federal Community Development Block Grant for Disaster Recovery, creating a new Division of Community Revitalization. Since starting from zero, the division has developed multiple housing programs, moved 1,500 families into homes, engaged 20 building contractors, and is preparing to scale up construction to thousands more units. He emphasized that recovery is inseparable from rebuilding communities, and the mission includes infrastructure development and revitalizing affected areas. In closing, Secretary Lilley reaffirmed the department's broader mission of "cultivating the conditions of prosperity," which he defined as helping individuals place themselves in the best position to support themselves and their families in the way they choose, underscoring this as the core work of the commission and its leadership.

Workforce Updates

Chair Rabon began by warmly reiterating his gratitude to Secretary Lilley for delivering remarks that he described as both inspirational and deeply rooted in a passion for public service. He reflected on how encouraging it was to hear the secretary speak with such conviction about the challenges and opportunities facing North Carolina and expressed his personal satisfaction at having him officially join the administration. He also acknowledged the presence of valued cabinet colleagues, noting the strength of collaboration within the governor's team.

Turning to commission matters, Chair Rabon reported on several significant developments since the commission's last meeting in May. He first recognized the retirement of Sandra Thompson, who concluded her service on June 30th after an extraordinary career of nearly 50 years in education. As associate vice president of college and career readiness at the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), Ms. Thompson also served as state director for WIOA Title II. Chair Rabon praised her unwavering dedication to student success, her mentorship of colleagues, and her long-standing contributions to the NCWorks Commission, offering heartfelt thanks and best wishes as she embarks on her next chapter. He then announced that Dr. Robert Van Dyke had been promoted to associate vice president for federal programs at the NCCCS. In this role, Dr. Van Dyke will oversee the administration of federal education and workforce grants, compliance with national performance standards, and the coordination of initiatives that connect adult learners to career pathways.

Chair Rabon next recognized Kim Toler, training manager for Nutrien in Aurora, N.C., who will retire on January 1, 2026, after many years of service on the NCWorks Commission. He thanked her for her dedication, particularly her advocacy for apprenticeship programs, noting her on-the-ground experience and commitment to strengthening North Carolina's workforce. Chair Rabon further congratulated commission member Olalah Njenga, a prominent small-business advocate, for publishing her book *Coffee with Jesus*, praising her entrepreneurial success and contributions to North Carolina's business community.

He also commended the Local Innovation Committee for its recent *Spotlight* publication on Guilford County's Summer Vocation Program—an initiative launched during the pandemic by then-Greensboro Police Chief Brian James and now led by Dr. Danielle Harrison of GuilfordWorks and the GuilfordWorks Foundation. The program connects youth to jobs, mentorship, and long-term career paths, and stands as a model of community-driven workforce development.

He closed by noting that many commission members will soon transition to new committees based on recent survey results and expressed deep appreciation to current committee chairs for their tireless work, stating he looked forward to welcoming the new chairs in the upcoming reorganization.

May Commission Meeting Minutes Approval

Chair Rabon opened the business portion of the meeting by calling for approval of the minutes from the May 14th meeting, noting that copies had been provided in members' packets. After inviting any comments or corrections and hearing none, he entertained a motion to approve. Hope Williams moved to approve the minutes, and Jeff Frederick seconded the motion. A voice vote followed, with all in favor and no one opposed. Chair Rabon declared the motion carried, and the minutes were approved as written before moving on to the next agenda item.

NC Workforce System Advocacy Taskforce

Chair Rabon shared a new video from Governor Josh Stein highlighting the NCWorks Career Center System and its services for job seekers and businesses, framing it as an effective awareness tool. He used the video to introduce the Workforce System Awareness and Advocacy Taskforce, formed earlier this year to strengthen advocacy for the workforce system. The taskforce includes approximately 15 commission members (including the chair) along with representatives from the North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards, the Division of Workforce Solutions, and is co-chaired by Mark Richardson and Himanshu Karvir. Chair Rabon then turned the floor over to Mr. Richardson to provide updates on the taskforce's progress.

Mr. Richardson reported that since its formation in March, the Workforce System Awareness and Advocacy Taskforce has convened roughly 10 times to advance multiple initiatives aimed at promoting

and strengthening the visibility of North Carolina's workforce system. The taskforce's signature product to date is an *Awareness and Advocacy Action Plan*—a comprehensive guide for planning, developing, and implementing a unified awareness campaign to help communities understand, recognize, and engage with workforce programs and services that support employment, training, and career development. To anchor the campaign's messaging, members created two proposed taglines: *"Driving business forward, one hire at a time. NCWorks."* and *"NCWorks – Connecting people and businesses for a stronger North Carolina."* These taglines are intended for use across media and public outreach efforts. Key elements of the action plan include hosting a *Workforce Advocacy Day* in spring 2026 and deploying targeted strategies to engage elected officials and raise their awareness of the workforce system's value. The taskforce has also developed an outline for a workforce system ROI infographic to visually convey the system's return on investment, as well as a centralized webpage where all workforce system partners can submit success stories and access a searchable repository of such stories for broader use. Both the action plan and ROI infographic outline have been submitted to Secretary Lilley and Governor Stein for review. Mr. Richardson closed by inviting questions before yielding the floor back to Chair Rabon.

Committee Updates

Skills and Education Attainment Committee

During the Skills and Education Committee report, Chair Sherry Carpenter recapped the committee's July meeting, which centered on strengthening connections between NCWorks partners, aligning with state workforce strategies, and engaging stakeholders. A significant focus was the comprehensive review of the Governor's Workforce Apprenticeship Council, where Dr. Annie Izod outlined the council's purpose, membership makeup, and 11 newly announced strategic goals. She explained how existing committees will be restructured to support these goals and detailed the transition process. Committee members reviewed the council's recent report and discussed the next steps. Chair Carpenter also highlighted *Policy, Partners, & Pathways: Expanding Apprenticeships in North Carolina*, held earlier that day, extending thanks to panelists Tammy Simmons, Andrew Berger-Grose, Wendy Walker-Fox and Dr. Chris Harrington for their expertise and contributions. She noted that materials from the panel discussion, along with contact information for panelists, are available for those who did not attend. Looking ahead, Chair Carpenter previewed the *Reentry Programs in Action* webinar scheduled for October 17th in Greensboro during the upcoming NCWorks Partnership Conference. The session, moderated by Chair Carpenter, will feature Anna London (Charlotte Works), Charles Mautz (Department of Adult Correction), and Philip Cooper (Operation Gateway), focusing on best practices, barriers, and available resources for employers and justice-involved individuals seeking employment.

Chair Carpenter closed her segment by expressing sincere gratitude to the committee members for their expertise and contributions, individually recognizing members Sean Brown, Sharene Pierce, Sandra Thompson, Candace Lowry, Himanshu Karvir, Darla McClamery, Michael Williams, Dr. Chris Harrington, Yvette German, Steven Hunt, Sonja Godsey, Dr. Robert Van Dyke, and Tracie Ford.

Employer Leadership Committee

Chair Jeff Frederick reported that the Employer Leadership and Engagement Committee convened virtually on July 16th to review progress in four core focus areas which are central to strengthen employer engagement and align workforce strategies across the state. The agenda featured presentations from Dr. Annie Izod, Ginger Brick, Tammy Simmons, and James Bain, each contributing perspectives from different points in the workforce system. Dr. Izod opened with a comprehensive update on the Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships, created by executive order to serve as the central driver of statewide workforce and apprenticeship strategy. She outlined the council's role in unifying efforts across agencies, setting shared priorities, and advancing the 11 strategic goals recently adopted. Dr. Izod also confirmed that, following the conclusion of today's NCWorks Commission

meeting, the current standing committees will sunset, and new subcommittees aligned to those strategic goals will be established, with NCWorks Commission members invited to serve in advisory capacities to ensure continuity of expertise and representation.

Ginger Brick, director of the Cape Fear Workforce Development Board, followed with updates on several innovative local initiatives. She highlighted the expansion of sector partnerships aimed at fostering industry-driven solutions, the growth of registered apprenticeships to address skills gaps, and the implementation of consistent data tracking mechanisms across workforce boards to improve performance measurement and transparency. Tammy Simmons of MSI shared her insights as a member of the governor's council, offering practical, business perspectives that complemented Dr. Izod's strategic overview. Her remarks underscored the importance of employer input in shaping training programs, aligning workforce pipelines with real-world needs, and ensuring that apprenticeship and job-readiness initiatives are responsive to market demands.

Chair Frederick closed by expressing his appreciation to the committee members for their commitment and contributions over the past two years, recognizing tangible achievements in advancing employer engagement, deepening cross-sector partnerships, and aligning regional work with statewide strategic objectives and then turned the floor over to Chair Speight of the Local Innovation Committee.

Local Innovation Committee

Chair Cynthia Speight began her report by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to update the commission and recognized the efforts of the Local Innovation Committee. She shared that the committee recently met with all three grantees and the external evaluator, Strategic Evaluations, to review progress over the past three years and prepare for the program outcome presentations scheduled for August 7th and 13th. These sessions focused on finalizing data, discussing evaluation findings, and ensuring that all materials were ready for presentation to the commission.

She also noted that the committee had met with all speakers for the upcoming NCWorks Partnership Conference, to be held October 16–17th, 2025, where they will host three featured sessions: a panel titled Artificial Intelligence in the Workforce – The Good, the Bad, and the Uncertain, a discussion called Will AI Take or Make Jobs?, and a workshop, Building Hope and Creating Opportunities for Opportunity Youth. Chair Speight highlighted the release of a new Spotlight publication, Guilford Summer Vocation Program: From Vision to Impact, now available on the NCWorks Commission website, and mentioned that a draft article on medical apprenticeships is also in progress for potential publication.

She expressed her appreciation for the committee's unwavering dedication and tireless efforts over the past two years, adding that it had been a privilege to serve as chair. Concluding her remarks, she introduced the Local Innovation grantees for their individual presentations.

Building Hope Presentation

Sarah Campbell of Hope Renovations reported that, with support from a two-year grant, the nonprofit expanded its trades training program for underemployed women and non-binary individuals across the Raleigh area and surrounding counties. The program graduated 40 participants, all completing classroom and hands on construction training, on the job experience, and career coaching, earning three industry recognized credentials. Seventy-five percent have entered the construction field through work or further education, 95 percent maintained or improved their confidence, and partnerships grew from the targeted five new employers to 20.

OPT-IN and J.E.T. Presentation

Shana Harrison of the Industrial Commons outlined the Work in Burke program's evolution from a workforce shortage awareness campaign into the OPT IN internship initiative, which has reduced Burke

County's opportunity youth rate by nearly five percent through paid internships, professional development, certifications, and mentorship. The program has since expanded to serve disconnected young adults through the JET initiative, producing notable success stories and fostering hope in rural communities.

REWI Presentation

Alexis Labonte of the Piedmont Triad Regional Workforce Development Board described the REWI project, which in its first year is focusing on staff training to better serve justice involved individuals, and will launch a paid adult work experience pilot in its second year to strengthen employer connections and improve reentry employment outcomes.

Strategic Evaluations, Inc. Presentation

Dawayne Whittington reported that his team's external evaluations of the Local Innovation grantees are tracking accomplishments, current projects, and next steps, with details and metrics accessible via shared QR code. He noted current needs involve data access, comparative information, or software rather than funding, and highlighted incorporating a justice involved evaluator as both program strength and alignment with state priorities. He closed by thanking committee members for their dedication before turning the meeting over to Chair Chris Egan.

Governance and System Alignment Committee

Chair Chris Egan reported that the committee last met on August 6th and reviewed two new Commission Policy Statements: CPS 04-2025 and CPS 05-2025. CPS 04-2025 establishes a requirement for local Workforce Development Boards to allocate 6 percent of their non-administrative WIOA Title I Adult and Youth funds annually toward pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship activities, beginning with Program Year 2025. These funds may be drawn from either the Adult or Youth programs, or a combination of both. CPS 05-2025 consolidates the complaint, appeal, and resolution procedures for WIOA Titles I and III, and formally rescinds CPS 08-2021 and CPS 07-2021. The committee voted to accept both policy statements and have them presented to the full commission on August 13th for a vote.

Following the policy review, James Bain provided an update to the committee members on the formation of four new commission committees and discussed how their work will align with Governor Stein's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships over the next two-year cycle. Wendy Johnson reported that all 20 local Workforce Development Boards have successfully completed the NCWorks Career Certification process.

Chair Egan concluded by thanking committee members for their dedication and contributions over the past two years, expressing appreciation for the opportunity to serve as chair, and then turned the floor back over to Chair Rabon for the commission vote.

Approval of the Commission Policy Statements

Chair Rabon acknowledged Chair Egan and the Governance and System Alignment Committee for their work in reviewing the two key action items: CPS 04-2025 and CPS 05-2025 and confirmed that both policy statements had been previously distributed to all commission members for review. He then opened the floor for any questions or comments regarding the policies and called for a vote on CPS 04-2025 and CPS 05-2025. With no objections, the motion passed unanimously, and both policy statements were approved as written.

NCWorks Career Center Certifications

Chair Rabon opened the next portion of the meeting by recognizing the successful completion of the

NCWorks Career Center Certification process by all 20 local Workforce Development Board areas. He commended these areas for meeting the commission's standards for quality customer service and acknowledged their dedication to supporting both job seekers and businesses throughout North Carolina. Chair Rabon emphasized the significance of this achievement, noting that certified NCWorks Career Centers now provide consistent, high-quality access to career and business services across all 100 counties in the state.

He proceeded to recognize each workforce development board, asking attendees to hold their applause until the end. The boards acknowledged included: Cape Fear, Capital Area, Centralina, Charlotte Works, Durham, Eastern Carolina, Foothills, Gaston County, GuilfordWorks, High Country, Kerr-Tar, Lumber River, Mid-Carolina, Mountain Area, Northeastern, Piedmont Triad Regional, Rivers East, Southwestern, Turning Point, and Western Piedmont. Chair Rabon concluded by inviting everyone to join him in congratulating the Workforce Development Boards and their NCWorks Career Center staff for their tireless efforts and commitment to excellence. Certificates were distributed, and photos taken at the conclusion of the meeting.

Final Updates

Before concluding the meeting, Chair Rabon invited Dr. Izod to share a few final updates with the commission. She began by drawing attention to the 2025 NCWorks Partnership Conference brochure included in each member's meeting packet. She announced that the conference will take place October 15–17th at the Four Seasons/Koury Convention Center in Greensboro, with this year's theme being *"Stronger Together – Unlimited Possibilities"*. She noted that a special NCWorks Commission luncheon is scheduled for Thursday, October 16th at 12:00 p.m. in the Meadowbrook Room.

Dr. Izod also reminded members that the next NCWorks Commission meeting will be held on November 19th in Morehead City at Carteret Community College. Lodging will be provided at The Beaufort Hotel in Beaufort, N.C. She shared that the meeting would include several exciting workforce tours and encouraged members to attend. She then turned the floor over to Chair Rabon to close the meeting.

Closing Remarks

Before adjourning the meeting, Chair Rabon opened the floor for any final questions or further discussion from the commission members. Secretary Lilley expressed gratitude for the opportunity to join the day's proceedings, and he emphasized his privilege of visiting various NCWorks Career Centers across North Carolina and commented on the consistently warm welcome he received. He praised the extraordinary work being done across the state, highlighting the dedication and impact of local teams. Chair Rabon responded with appreciation, acknowledging Secretary Lilley's ongoing commitment and presence, even when not physically in attendance. He affirmed the value of his contributions and the importance of his role within the commission. As the meeting ended, Chair Rabon thanked everyone for their participation and encouraged safe travels back to their respective destinations. With no further business brought forward, the meeting was officially adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Annie Izod

Approved on November 19, 2025