

To: Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

RE: Department Reports #2. Workforce Development and Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) Funded Programs

From: Prudence Ratliff

This letter is my opinion as a public citizen and not as an affiliation with any agency or organization.

Dear Board of Supervisors;

I am writing this letter in response to the staff report provided for Workforce Development and WIOA funded programs. It is unfortunate that this is even coming before the BOS without including any information discussed at the March 26, 2021 Executive Committee of the Humboldt County Workforce Development Board (HC-WDB). In addition, there are some inaccuracies in the staff report.

#### Staffing – Page 3

The understaffing has been squarely blamed on COVID. Even though COVID acerbated the staffing issues the HC-WDB has faced, these issues started years before COVID occurred. When the former Director Cindy Harrington resigned 4 years ago all of her duties were given to another person, but that person was not appointed to that position for several months. Then suddenly it was announced at an Executive Committee meeting that another person would be the Director without any explanation. That person was in the position for about a year and then went out on Administrative leave. The duties then went back to the person who was appointed to the position a year earlier and became the Acting Director. Six months later the HC-WDB received the letter from Supervisor Michelle Bushnell instructing that the job classification of Executive Director was not to be used. At that time the HC-WDB was informed that Scott Adair would be the Director. No discussion had occurred regarding a staffing agreement before this time which would have addressed staffing issues years ago. This continuous change in staffing has only caused confusion, frustration and chaos within the programs provided by the HC-WDB.

#### Findings related to Humboldt County workforce efforts – Page 4

Second bullet point, staffing shortfalls and personnel challenges have NOT affected the level of services, but has affected the staff support provided due to the chaos described above under staffing.

Third bullet point, due to the structuring of Humboldt's local workforce area the efficacy of Humboldt's workforce programs are actually higher than nearby counties for several reasons. This structure as a stand-alone regional planning unit (RPU) allows the HC-WDB the ability to address our local needs that are very different than other RPUs. This structure allows for the ability to bring together a variety of agencies such as those listed on page 6 to address the local workforce needs. Through this structure the HC-WDB has been able to bring in millions of dollars of grant funding. The fifth bullet point is not exactly correct when the HC-WDB has been pursuing and awarded several labor initiatives for rural communities both before and during the current chaos that the HC-WDB has suffered. This

included a grant from the Department of Labor under the HC-WDB Director before Cindy Harrington that created several training programs: Medical Assisting, Solar Installation, etc.

Grant funding was brought into the County by the Acting Director over the years. The following is only some the grants that were awarded and the accomplishments:

- Slingshot Health
  - Developed the RN to BSN program between College of the Redwoods and Humboldt State University.
  - Provided funding to help working Medical Assistants become certified to be able to do more in their healthcare positions. Over 35 Medical Assistants were certified.
  - Supported the Health Exploration Summer Institute through HCOE for high school students to perform job shadowing in local hospitals resulting in an increased interest for students to enter the healthcare field.
- Slingshot Round 2
  - Provided funding to the Humboldt County Office of Education to provide career exploration in the building trades industry.
  - Funded a mobile trailer to take out to far flung high schools to provide hands on exploration of the industry.
- Prison to Employment Grant
  - Provided training to formerly incarcerated persons in the building trades, auto body collision repair and truck driving industries.
  - Mindfulness classes were provided to 7 formerly incarcerated persons and to over 80 county and Job Market employees who work with this population.

At the Executive Committee of the HC-WDB meeting on March 26<sup>th</sup> several recommendations were presented and discussed. The final motion from the HC-WDB is not included in this staff report.

The motion adopted was as follows:

- It was moved to make recommendation to BOS that the WDB EC recommends to pursue immediately only certain items laid out in CAO staffs report to the BOS and to hold off on other items (until a later time) in order to allow time to explore and review. The recommended items for WDB EC to pursue as immediate need were specified as follows:
  - Explore the creation of a comprehensive staffing and services agreement between the county and the HC-WDB to better define staff roles, responsibilities and staff services provided to the HC-WDB by the County;
  - Direct staff to release a Request for Proposals (RFP) and to collect bids for services presently being performed by SMART, a County workforce vendor, to replace SMART as a Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) service provider if or should SMART cancel services with the County of Humboldt.
    - The contract with SMART ends June 30, 2021 and under WIOA, the HC-WDB is required to release a RFP.
  - Authorize and memorialize the agreement between the CAO's Office of Economic Development and the County of Humboldt Auditor Controller to



process SMART invoices weekly until and through the end of SMART's contract term.

- Authorize the Economic Development Division Director and the BOS appointed representative to the HC-WDB, to sign and execute programmatic level State forms and documents specific to WIOA funded workforce programs and to the County of Humboldt's Local Workforce Area.

Items the WDB EC wished to hold off on included:

- Explore working with State partners to modify Humboldt County's Local Workforce Area (A geographic area comprised of single or multiple units of general local governments that are designated by the Governor to receive funds to administer the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I programs) to allow for a merger with a another regional joint powers agency or workforce consortium such as The Northern Rural Training and Employment Consortium (NoRTEC) or The Workforce Alliance of the North Bay (WANB); and/or
  - In my personal opinion, joining another regional planning unit does not make sense for Humboldt County. Our county and community would lose local control over the initiatives that are put into place along with millions of dollars in grant funds. In addition, WIOA funding for Humboldt County is over \$817K per year that would not be available to provide training and supportive services to local citizens. NoRTEC is already an 11 county consortium that often only spends funds in a couple of counties. In addition, many of the counties in that region have Cannabis prohibitions. Given that the Cannabis industry is a large part of the Humboldt county economy NoRTEC would NOT be a good fit. WANB has I believe 5 counties and is located hundreds of miles away from Humboldt. It is very unlikely that funds would be spent in Humboldt for workforce development.
- Explore establishing a local Labor Committee or Board in place of the HC-WDB to inform and advise the BOS on local workforce and labor issues (should/if merging with another regional joint powers agency or workforce consortium were to occur); and/or
- Explore the separation of the HC-WDB from the County of Humboldt to become an independent non-profit (501c3) entity; and/or
  - This could be very expensive
- Explore the transition of staff and supportive services provided to the HC-WDB from the County of Humboldt's office of Economic Development to County of Humboldt Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

In conclusion, it is important for the Board of Supervisors to consider that some of the recommendations would have a detrimental impact on our community and economy. It is disingenuous to punish public citizens because a vendor was not paid on time and staffing issues that have been going on for years were not discussed or worked out with the HC-WDB.

Sincerely,  
Prudence Ratliff