



May 30, 2024

The Honorable Mike Dunleavy
Governor of Alaska
State Capitol
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Governor Dunleavy:

Thank you for your waiver request submission to the U.S. Department of Labor regarding certain statutory and regulatory provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the accompanying plan to improve the statewide workforce development system (enclosed). The waiver request was received March 5, 2024, as part of your recent WIOA State Plan submission. This letter provides the Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) official response to your request and memorializes that Alaska will meet the outcomes and implement the measures identified in its plan to ensure accountability agreed to by Alaska and ETA. This action is taken under the Secretary of Labor's authority to waive certain requirements of WIOA Title I, Subtitles A, B, and E, and Sections 8–10 of the Wagner-Peyser Act in WIOA Section 189(i).

Requested Waiver: Waiver of the requirements outlined in WIOA Section 107(b), to allow a state workforce development board to carry out the roles and responsibilities of a local board.

ETA Response: ETA approves, for Program Years (PYs) 2024 and 2025, the State's request for a waiver to allow the state board to carry out the roles of the local workforce development boards in the State. ETA reviewed Alaska's waiver request and plan and has determined that the requirements requested to be waived impede the ability of the State to implement its plan to improve the workforce development system. Under this waiver, the Governor may designate the state board to carry out the roles and responsibilities of the local boards in the State. In implementing this waiver, the State must:

- Continue to include local input into its activities; and
- Allocate funding to the local area for which the state board is carrying out local board functions.

The State must report its waiver outcomes and implementation of the approved waiver in the WIOA Annual Report. ETA will use this information to assess continued waiver approval and to identify promising practices that may be adopted more widely. ETA is available to provide technical assistance to you in support of your goals. If you have questions, feel free to contact my office at (202) 693-2772.

Sincerely,



José Javier Rodríguez

Enclosure

cc: Catherine Muñoz, Commissioner Designee, Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development
Dr. Tamika Ledbetter, Regional Administrator, ETA
Violet Jackson, Federal Project Officer, ETA

Alaska – 1 Waiver: State Board as Local Board

Submitted March 5, 2024

The current waiver allowing the State Board to carry out the functions of a Local Board expires June 30, 2024. Alaska is requesting a renewal of this waiver, with the information below providing the plan and justification for this waiver request.

(1) Identifies the statutory or regulatory requirements for which a waiver is requested and the goals that the State or local area, as appropriate, intends to achieve as a result of the waiver and how those goals relate to the Unified or Combined State Plan

The overarching goals of this combined state plan and the associated waiver request are rooted in a commitment to enhance the efficiency and performance of Alaska's workforce system. Aligned with the state's vision to "Enhance and improve opportunities for all Alaskans to obtain high skill, high wage jobs and careers by promoting the dignity of work and the value of employment," the request seeks to allow the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) to carry out the role of a local board for the entire state. This streamlined governance structure, with a single board overseeing workforce investments across Alaska, is currently housed under the Alaska Commissioner of Labor and collaborates closely with all Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) programs to ensure inclusivity and diversity in local areas.

The State of Alaska is seeking the continuance of its waiver under the WIOA Section 107(b) application, empowering the State Board to fulfill the Local Board(s) roles. Recognizing the unique workforce dynamics in each area, the AWIB actively engages local officials and employers to solicit feedback. This engagement is facilitated through various channels, including individual outreach by board members, opportunities for input at the three yearly board meetings held at diverse locations, and participation in local economic development gatherings and summits.

Key elements of the ongoing engagement strategy include the geographic diversity reflected in board member locations, a dedicated sub-committee addressing the state's diversity, and non-voting seats for mayors from each local area. Continuation of the waiver is widely supported, given its practicality in allowing the State Board to fulfill the roles of local boards. Disruption of this waiver would be counter-productive to workforce development in Alaska, potentially leading to fund inefficiencies and operational challenges associated with managing multiple local boards.

The equitable distribution of funding further strengthens the case for the waiver, as outlined in Policy 07-518.1. Guided by labor market data and unemployment figures, funding allocation ensures a fair distribution among the local areas. Competitive grants play a significant role in the distribution of WIOA Youth allocations, while Adult and Dislocated Worker allocations are channeled through job centers and competitive grants.

The history of the AWIB's authorization as an alternate entity, beginning in 2016 and renewed in 2018, 2020, and 2022, underscores the continued need for this unique approach. Official letters

on the AWIB webpage provide additional documentation and transparency regarding the waiver request. The ongoing commitment to an inclusive and streamlined workforce development system is evident in the collaborative efforts of the AWIB, contributing to the realization of Alaska's vision for enhanced opportunities and career advancement for all its residents. Below are the links to the official waiver approval letters on the AWIB webpage AWIB Plans Policies and Initiatives <https://awib.alaska.gov/ppi.htm>.

- 2016 <https://awib.alaska.gov/forms/AK PY 2016 Waiver Letter June 2016.pdf>
- 2018 <https://awib.alaska.gov/forms/AK PY 2018 Waiver Letter June 2018.pdf>
- 2020 <https://awib.alaska.gov/forms/AK PY 2020 Waiver Letter2 26 May 2020 signed.pdf>
- 2022 <https://awib.alaska.gov/documents/AK Signed Waiver Letter.pdf>

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) operates under the authorization of Alaska statute and is comprised of members appointed by the governor. The board is designed to be inclusive and representative, featuring key figures from the governor's cabinet and various sectors. Cabinet members include the Lieutenant Governor' Commissioners of Labor and Workforce Development; Health; Education & Early Development; and Commerce, Community, and Economic Development.

Board membership extends to representatives from diverse educational institutions, such as the University of Alaska system, secondary and postsecondary vocational education, adult education, and public education. The composition also reflects the involvement of business and industry, with four board members representing these sectors alongside four representatives from organized labor. The board includes members with specific expertise, such as a professional with experience in individuals with developmental disabilities, a veteran, and a representative from an organization focusing on the employment and training needs of Alaska Natives.

To ensure local input, two chief local elected officials have been appointed to the board. This strategy aims to incorporate perspectives from different regions and communities, contributing to the effectiveness and inclusivity of the AWIB as an Alternate Entity State Board. This diverse and comprehensive composition positions the AWIB to address Alaska's multifaceted workforce development needs, leveraging experience and expertise across various sectors and communities.

The AWIB roster is available on the AWIB website https://awib.alaska.gov/AWIB_roster.pdf.

(2) Describes the actions that the State or local area, as appropriate, has undertaken to remove State or local statutory or regulatory barriers;

The governor has designated Alaska as a statewide area and workforce region for WIOA purposes. There are no state or local barriers to the implementation of this waiver.

(3) Describes the goals of the waiver and the expected programmatic outcomes if the request is granted;

The continuation of the waiver is pivotal for streamlining Alaska's governance structure, ensuring responsiveness to the state's unique economic and geographic considerations, particularly in the face of fiscal challenges.

The waiver is crucial in simplifying awarding grants by eliminating redundant administrative layers and processes. The Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB), serving as both the local and state board and situated under the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) Commissioner, collaborates closely with DOLWD, including collaboration on determining grant criteria, reviewing grant applications, and evaluating subrecipients, resulting in a more efficient and consolidated approach.

Furthermore, the waiver enables the DOLWD to maintain consistent standards across the state. This consistency is vital, preventing the existence of multiple boards with varying eligibility and performance standards across different regions. The streamlined approach facilitated by the waiver ensures a cohesive and unified implementation of workforce programs.

The waiver's continuation will lead to improved accountability in workforce investment programs. Having one board overseeing all workforce programs ensures consistency in the evaluation and oversight processes. Additionally, it allows the DOLWD to report as a single area, enhancing clarity and transparency in reporting mechanisms. This unified approach contributes to a more effective and accountable workforce development system that aligns with the state's unique economic landscape and geographical challenges.

(4) Describes how the waiver will align with the Department's policy priorities, such as:

- (A) supporting employer engagement;**
- (B) connecting education and training strategies;**
- (C) support work-based learning;**
- (D) improving job and career results, and**
- (E) other guidance issued by the Department.**

The majority of Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) members represent business and the private sector, hailing from diverse industries across the state. These dedicated board members are firmly committed to amplifying the voice of employers in the workforce system. Their proactive engagement extends beyond the boardroom as they reach out to others, fostering collaboration and involvement in workforce initiatives.

The AWIB maintains a focus on employer engagement, recognizing it as a cornerstone of effective workforce development. The board is dedicated to forging vital connections between education and training strategies. This includes the strategic development of career pathways, active support for work-based learning, and an overarching commitment to enhancing career outcomes for job seekers and employers. By aligning education and training initiatives with the dynamic needs of the workforce, the AWIB works to create a cooperative relationship that contributes to the overall success and prosperity of Alaska's workforce and economy.

(5) Describes the individuals affected by the waiver, including how the waiver will impact services for disadvantaged populations or individuals with multiple barriers to employment;

This waiver positively impacts all WIOA-eligible participants, including disadvantaged populations and those facing multiple barriers to employment, and employers. The streamlined approach ensures that participants and employers do not need to seek resources from different local areas, as the state operates and reports as a single statewide designation.

By functioning as a unified entity, the waiver eliminates the need for participants and employers to navigate different local systems or face potential disparities in resource availability. This statewide designation enhances accessibility and consistency in delivering services and resources, providing a more seamless experience for those seeking workforce development support.

The waiver is particularly beneficial for disadvantaged populations and individuals with multiple barriers to employment, as it facilitates a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to addressing their unique needs. Employers, too, benefit from this streamlined structure, as they can engage with a unified system that offers consistent services and resources throughout the state. Overall, the waiver ensures that WIOA-eligible participants and employers experience a more efficient and effective workforce development process, fostering equal access and opportunities across the entire state.

(6) Describes the processes used to:

- (A) Monitor the progress in implementing the waiver;**
- (B) Provide notice to any local board affected by the waiver;**
- (C) Provide any local board affected by the waiver an opportunity to comment on the request;**
- (D) Ensure meaningful public comment, including comment by business and organized labor, on the waiver.**
- (E) Collect and report information about waiver outcomes in the State's WIOA Annual Report.**

During the development of this waiver, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) actively sought input from local officials and employers across the state. As part of the plan development process, DOLWD solicited feedback, creating an inclusive and participatory approach. Notably, no local officials expressed a desire for designation as a local area, and the draft local area designation and waiver process received no comments.

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) is committed to maintaining this engagement with local stakeholders. The AWIB will continue to solicit valuable feedback through various channels, including individual outreach by AWIB members to their local officials. Opportunities for input will be provided at each AWIB meeting. These meetings will focus on statewide strategies and their direct connection to the economic and workforce development needs of different regions within the state.

The process by which a local area designation may be requested is thoroughly outlined and referenced in Section VI, Program Specific Requirements for Core Programs of the Alaska WIOA Combined Plan. This ensures transparency and clarity regarding the avenues available for local areas to seek designation, emphasizing the collaborative and inclusive nature of the waiver development and implementation process.

Policy and Procedure

The outline of the policy and procedure to request designation as a local area is:

Policies

The chief elected official and local governing board from any unit of general local government or combination of units may submit a request for designation as a workforce development area. The AWIB, in consultation with DOLWD staff, will review the request and recommend approval or denial to the governor.

Designation as a new local area will be based on the extent to which the proposed area demonstrates that it:

- Is consistent with local labor market areas; and
- Has a joint economic development area; and
- Has the federal and non-federal resources, including appropriate education and training institutions, to administer activities under the Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker formula programs under WIOA Title I-B; and
- Has the fiscal, administrative, and reporting capacity and systems to report on participant outcomes as required by WIOA and the Alaska WIOA Combined Plan.

The governor may approve or deny the request for designation. In either case, DOLWD will notify the applicant in writing. If the request is denied, the written notification will include the reasons for the denial. The applicant may appeal if the request for local area designation is denied.

Appeals must be made to the AWIB and address each issue cited in the denial notification. If a decision on the appeal is not made within 60 days or if the appeal to the AWIB does not result in the designation of the local area, the applicant may request a review by the Secretary of Labor per 20 CFR Section 683.640 of the WIOA statute.

Procedures

A request for local area designation must be made on a form supplied by DOLWD. A completed and signed request must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. on May 1 of the year preceding the Program Year for which the request is being made.

Any local area wishing to appeal the governor's decision must be made per the appeal procedures described in the Policies Section above. Incomplete or unsigned requests will be returned and application review will be delayed.

The governor will monitor the progress of this waiver by reviewing information provided by DOLWD and the AWIB on costs, processes for awarding grants, eligibility standards, and performance on accountability measures. This information will also be used to report waiver outcomes in the state's annual WIOA reports.

(7) The most recent data available regarding the results and outcomes observed through implementation of the existing waiver, in cases where the State seeks renewal of a previously approved waiver.

The State of Alaska, operating as a single-area state, has demonstrated significant success in aligning with the provisions outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), specifically under WIOA sec. 107 and relevant regulatory sections including 20 CFR § 679.270, § 679.300, and § 679.370.

Under the leadership of the AWIB serving as the Local Workforce Development Board (Local WIB), Alaska has effectively carried out the mandated functions per WIOA regulations. The state's commitment to fulfilling the outlined responsibilities has contributed to its success as a single-area state.

Key Achievements and Highlights

Alignment with WIOA sec. 107

The State of Alaska has actively aligned its workforce development strategies and initiatives with the objectives outlined in WIOA section 107. This alignment ensures that the state's workforce programs are designed to meet the needs of businesses, job seekers, and the community.

In adherence to state statute and WIOA sec. 107, the Alaska Governor appoints representatives to the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB). These appointees represent governmental

and economic development entities, mirroring the diverse landscape of the state's businesses and job seekers across its six economic regions. As outlined in the statute, these representatives play integral roles in shaping the direction of the AWIB, contributing to its mission of supporting economic development and workforce initiatives throughout the state.

The board structure has been designed to ensure broad representation, with each state region having a voice in decision-making. This approach guarantees that the AWIB is well-informed about the specific needs and challenges faced by businesses, job seekers, and the state within each economic region.

The commitment to appointing representatives per state statutes underscores the dedication to transparency, legal compliance, and equitable representation in pursuing the AWIB's objectives. This approach further strengthens the effectiveness of the AWIB in meeting the unique demands of Alaska's diverse communities.

Compliance with 20 CFR § 679.270

Alaska has successfully adhered to the requirements specified in 20 CFR § 679.270, ensuring that the State WIB, in its capacity as the Local WIB, effectively carries out essential functions while strategically reducing unnecessary burdens and avoiding duplication of processes.

Per 20 CFR § 679.270, the State of Alaska, operating as a single-board state, has established a robust and integrated model for addressing workforce needs. Collaboratively, a variety of the state's departments, including Labor and Workforce Development; Health; Education & Early Development; Family and Community Services; Corrections; and Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, along with strategic partners, have developed a coordinated approach to deliver comprehensive services that cater to the employment and career goals of businesses and job seekers throughout Alaska.

This state model ensures that businesses and job seekers benefit from a seamless and effective path toward sustainability. By combining services and resources, including education, training, counseling, job placement, and support services, the state offers a comprehensive solution tailored to the unique needs of both businesses and job seekers. This approach results in a streamlined system that enhances the overall effectiveness of workforce development initiatives.

The single-board state structure in Alaska has proven instrumental in facilitating collaboration among government agencies, educational institutions, businesses, and community organizations. This collaborative effort eliminates barriers and creates a cohesive network of services, addressing the state's immediate and long-term workforce development needs. The interconnected system ensures that individuals and businesses can access diverse services without encountering unnecessary hurdles.

Alaska's model also extends tailored support to businesses, recognizing their critical role in the state's economic landscape. The state aims to enhance its competitiveness, growth, and contribution to Alaska's overall economic prosperity by offering targeted services to businesses.

As a single-board state, Alaska has successfully employed a strategic and resourceful approach to leveraging funds. Through strategic partnerships, co-investment initiatives, and efficient resource allocation, the state has maximized its financial impact and garnered additional support to meet the diverse workforce needs of each region.

The collaborative spirit of Alaska's strategic partnerships has played a pivotal role in attracting external support and resources. By forging alliances with public and private entities, the state has pooled resources, shared expertise, and collectively addressed workforce challenges. This collaborative effort has not only increased the overall funding available but has also facilitated knowledge exchange and innovative solutions.

Co-investment strategies in Alaska have proven effective in optimizing financial resources. Encouraging multiple stakeholders to contribute to common goals has resulted in a diversified funding base. This approach not only spreads financial responsibilities but also enhances the sustainability of workforce development initiatives, ensuring a resilient and adaptable system.

Efficient resource allocation has been a cornerstone of Alaska's success in leveraging funding. The state has achieved more with less by optimizing the use of existing resources. This efficient approach ensures that funds are directed where they are most needed, maximizing the impact on workforce development initiatives.

Alaska diligently complies with the stipulations outlined in 20 CFR § 679.270. The AWIB, acting as the Local WIB, adeptly fulfills its crucial functions. Notably, Alaska strategically streamlines processes, minimizing unnecessary burdens and preventing duplication, to ensure efficient and effective implementation of workforce development initiatives.

Effective Implementation of § 679.300

Alaska has effectively implemented the requirements outlined in 20 CFR § 679.300. The state has prioritized incorporating local interests, ensuring that workforce development initiatives are tailored to the unique needs and priorities of the local community.

In our examination of how Alaska aligns with WIOA sec. 107 and complies with 20 CFR § 679.270, it is evident that the state has effectively implemented the requirements outlined in 20 CFR § 679.300. Alaska's commitment to incorporating local interests is a key highlight. The state places a significant emphasis on tailoring workforce development initiatives to align with each local region's distinct needs and priorities.

This deliberate and customized approach goes beyond mere compliance with federal regulations; it reflects Alaska's dedication to being responsive to the specific challenges and

opportunities present in the state. Alaska has successfully created a more impactful and community-driven approach to workforce development by prioritizing regional needs.

In essence, the state's strategy ensures that its workforce development efforts are not only legally sound but also deeply rooted in the realities and aspirations of the communities they serve. Alaska's proactive stance in aligning with federal guidelines while simultaneously addressing the unique characteristics of each locality exemplifies a comprehensive and effective model for workforce development that is both regulatory-compliant and community-centric.

Strategic Fulfillment of § 679.370

Alaska has not only met the functions specified in § 679.370 but has done so in a manner that showcases flexibility and innovation. The state has successfully balanced incorporating local interests while minimizing unnecessary burdens and process duplications.

By effectively balancing the incorporation of local interests, Alaska ensures that workforce development initiatives are finely tuned to the unique needs of each community. Simultaneously, the state has minimized unnecessary burdens and avoided process duplications, demonstrating a commitment to streamlined and efficient operations. This strategy showcases Alaska's capacity to meet regulatory requirements while fostering a dynamic and responsive environment for workforce development.

Alaska's success as a single-area state underscores its commitment to creating a dynamic and responsive workforce ecosystem. By adhering to the principles outlined in WIOA sec. 107 and the associated sections, the state has positioned itself as a model for effective workforce development that considers both statewide and local needs.

This success underscores the State of Alaska's unwavering commitment to cultivating a robust and responsive workforce development system designed to effectively address the distinctive needs of Alaska as a single workforce planning area. The highlighted achievements vividly demonstrate the state's dedication to optimizing the impact of workforce initiatives through collaborative efforts with key stakeholders. This collaborative approach works to foster economic growth, support businesses, and empower individuals to thrive in a rapidly changing labor market. Alaska's initiatives are thoughtfully tailored to the evolving needs of the state, reflecting a dynamic and forward-thinking approach to workforce development that ensures the continued success and resilience of Alaska's workforce.