



Mississippi's Proposed Workflex Plan 2026

A unified approach to increasing flexibility, efficiency, and impact across Mississippi's workforce system.



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION



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Executive Summary

Mississippi is driving a comprehensive modernization of its workforce development system to better connect residents to quality employment opportunities and ensure the state's economy has access to a highly skilled workforce aligned with the state's economic development strategy, while also acknowledging the depths of which human capital's expectations of work changed in the 2020's. Under the leadership of Governor Tate Reeves and in partnership with the Mississippi Legislature and the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB), Mississippi has worked to align education, workforce development, and economic development strategies to support long-term economic growth and improved economic mobility for Mississippians.

Within this strategy, the Mississippi Development Authority works across the state with economic developers and officials to drive development activity (e.g. demand); AccelerateMS works broadly to set the workforce strategy and guide partners towards desired outcomes driven by economic needs (e.g. alignment); the Departments of Education and Correction, Institutions of Higher Learning, the Community College Board, and Adult Education (Skill Up) provide education and training (e.g. preparation); the Departments of Human Services and Rehabilitation Services serve to mitigate barriers for participants (e.g. support); and the Local Workforce Development Areas and the Department of Employment Security work to provide the job placement services (e.g. placement). The alignment work, visually depicted in Figure 1, centers on aligning education, workforce training, and workforce services to support those attempting to secure quality jobs, while the job placement work seeks to match workers with quality jobs to meet the demand induced by economic development.

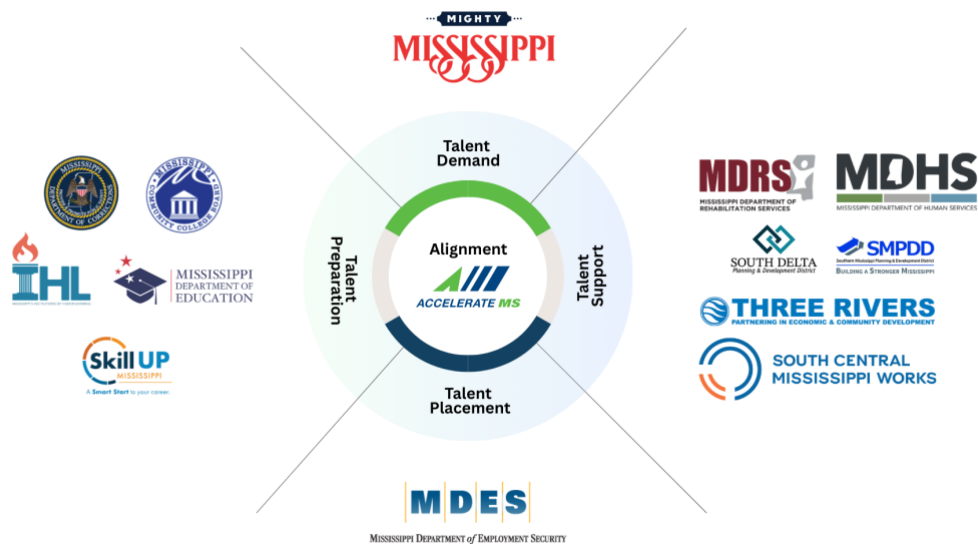


Figure 1: Mississippi's Talent Ecosystem

The creation of AccelerateMS, the state's Office of Workforce Development, in 2020 reflects Mississippi's commitment to coordinating workforce policy across agencies and aligning workforce investments with the state's economic priorities. Through AccelerateMS, Mississippi has implemented a statewide strategy known as the Aligned Training and Livelihood Action Strategy (ATLAS), which provides a framework to align education and workforce programs with industry demand, priority occupations, and measurable outcomes. The ATLAS strategy emphasizes data-driven decision-making, coordination across state and federal workforce programs, and stronger partnerships between employers, educators, and workforce providers. Through this strategy, Mississippi is directing investments toward training programs for all ages and stages of life that prepare individuals for occupations that provide sustainable wages and long-term career opportunities.

MDES is the Governor's designated WIOA Title I grant recipient and administers all Title I funds on behalf of the State, serving as Mississippi's administrative and fiscal agent responsible for federal reporting, fiscal controls, monitoring, and overall compliance with WIOA requirements. In this role, MDES ensures that Title I resources are used responsibly and effectively across the state's workforce system while providing oversight of subrecipient activities and maintaining program integrity. To further advance this work, Mississippi is seeking Workflex authority under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Workflex authority will allow the State to reduce administrative barriers, better align federal and state workforce funding streams, and deploy resources faster and more strategically in support of priority sectors and occupations. Mississippi intends to use this authority to demonstrate how greater state flexibility and leadership can strengthen workforce outcomes, expand access to training opportunities, and improve coordination across workforce programs. Mississippi also believes that the lessons learned from this work can contribute to broader national efforts to modernize workforce systems and strengthen the connection among workforce development, education, and economic growth.

Mississippi views Workflex authority not only as a mechanism for administrative flexibility but also as an opportunity to demonstrate how a coordinated, demand-driven workforce system can more effectively connect workers to quality jobs while supporting employers' workforce needs. By aligning workforce, education, and economic development strategies, Mississippi is positioned to test innovative approaches that strengthen workforce outcomes while maintaining strong accountability for public resources. Mississippi believes that states that have demonstrated strong governance and accountability should be empowered to pilot new approaches to workforce system modernization.

Mississippi Workforce System Transformation

Under Governor Reeves leadership, Mississippi has taken significant steps to modernize its workforce development system to better align education and workforce programs with the needs of employers and the realities of the state's economy. Central to this has been an effort to coordinate workforce investments, improve accountability, and ensure that workforce programs deliver measurable outcomes for individuals and employers. Ultimately, the entire system must work together to:

- Move Mississippians from poverty into quality jobs through coordinated workforce and education pathways;
- Align workforce, education, and economic development strategies to support priority industries and occupations; and
- Use public workforce resources more strategically and efficiently to produce measurable employment outcomes.

The State Workforce Investment Board directs the system as a whole and reflects Mississippi's commitment to shifting from a fragmented, program-driven system toward a more coordinated, demand-driven approach to workforce development whereby potential participants may receive services and training in a true no-wrong-door system. This work focuses on aligning education to priority sectors, workforce programs to the humans who need to use these services provided, around strengthening education pathways that lead to industry-valued credentials, and expanding access to training opportunities that lead to quality jobs.

Mississippi's workforce transformation is also closely connected to the state's economic development strategy. Over the past several years, Mississippi has secured more than \$20 billion in economic development investments across advanced manufacturing, shipbuilding, energy, logistics, aerospace, and technology sectors. These investments require a workforce system capable of responding quickly to industry demand while also preparing workers for emerging industries.

Analysis conducted through the State Workforce Investment Board indicates that the state will need approximately 19,000 additional workers in priority occupations by 2035 to meet employer demand across key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, construction, logistics, and shipbuilding. This projected workforce gap reflects both industry growth and the need to replace experienced workers as they retire. Mississippi's workforce strategy is therefore focused on aligning education, workforce training, and career navigation systems to prepare individuals for these high-demand occupations. Mississippi is also investing in emerging technology sectors such as artificial intelligence and advanced manufacturing. Through initiatives such as the Mississippi Artificial Intelligence Network and MAI-TAP, the state is working with universities, industry partners, secondary education, and national organizations to ensure that Mississippi's workforce is prepared for technology-driven industries.

These efforts reflect Mississippi's belief that states should have both greater authority and greater responsibility for designing workforce systems that meet the needs of their economies. By aligning workforce investments with industry demand and focusing on measurable outcomes, Mississippi is building a workforce system that supports economic growth while expanding opportunity for residents across the state.

“Mississippi has proven over the past decade that when we set clear goals, align our systems, and stay focused on outcomes, we can lead the nation. Our students have made some of the fastest academic gains in the country, and those results didn't happen by accident — they came from alignment, accountability, and a commitment to doing what works. Now we're applying those same lessons to our workforce system — bringing together education, training,

and economic development so more Mississippians can move into quality jobs and build stronger communities across our state.”

— Governor Tate Reeves

Mississippi’s workforce transformation is grounded in a clear objective: helping individuals move from poverty into quality, sustainable employment as efficiently and frequently as possible while strengthening the state’s economic competitiveness. To accomplish this, Mississippi has focused on several core priorities.

- **Aligning Workforce Development with Economic Development:** Mississippi recognizes that workforce development and economic development must operate as part of the same strategy. As new industries locate or expand within the state, AccelerateMS works directly with employers to understand workforce requirements and develop, in partnership with the Mississippi Development Authority and local economic developers, training strategies that prepare Mississippians for these opportunities.
- **Coordinating Workforce and Education Programs:** Mississippi is aligning programs authorized under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and state workforce investments in order to create a more coordinated talent development system. Through collaboration among AccelerateMS, the State Workforce Investment Board, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, the Mississippi Community College Board, the Mississippi Department of Education, and industry partners, Mississippi is working to ensure that workforce and education programs support clear pathways into employment in high-demand industries.
- **Focusing Workforce Investments on Priority Occupations:** Mississippi is aligning workforce and education investments around priority occupations (available for viewing at mspathfinder.org) that demonstrate strong employer demand, competitive wages, and opportunities for career advancement. This strategy helps ensure that workforce programs prepare individuals for occupations that support both economic mobility and long-term economic growth. By focusing public workforce investments on occupations that offer sustainable employment opportunities, Mississippi is strengthening its ability to move individuals into quality jobs while supporting the workforce needs of employers.
- **Strengthening Accountability and Responsible Use of Workforce Resources:** Mississippi believes that states should have both greater authority and greater responsibility in the administration of federal workforce programs. With this authority comes the expectation that states will be accountable for producing the outcomes that Congress and the President have established for federal workforce programs. Mississippi welcomes this responsibility and is committed to demonstrating that a coordinated, demand-driven workforce system can improve

employment outcomes for workers while ensuring responsible stewardship of public workforce resources.

- Mississippi also recognizes that many individuals seeking to enter or reenter the workforce face barriers to employment. Consistent with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the state remains committed to ensuring that individuals with barriers to employment have access to workforce services, training opportunities, and supportive services that enable successful participation in the labor market. At the same time, Mississippi's workforce strategy seeks to expand access to training and employment opportunities for any individual who is ready and interested in entering high-demand industries. By combining employer-driven workforce strategies with continued support for individuals facing barriers to employment, Mississippi aims to ensure that workforce programs expand opportunities for all residents while helping employers meet critical workforce needs.

- Mississippi ensures that workforce initiatives align with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements. The populations served encompass both general job seekers and specific groups facing significant barriers to employment. At its core, the workforce system is designed to support individuals seeking employment, career advancement, and training opportunities across education and skill levels, while also placing emphasis on traditionally underserved or disadvantaged groups. Populations with barriers include those defined under WIOA such as low-income individuals, people with disabilities (including youth with disabilities), older adults, ex-offenders, homeless individuals and youth, individuals with limited English proficiency or low literacy, single parents, migrants/seasonal farmworkers, those nearing TANF eligibility exhaustion, and disconnected youth not in school or work. These groups often experience systemic obstacles that limit access to training, employment, and economic mobility, and the workforce plan outlines strategies to connect them with tailored services like individualized career counseling, training programs, and support services designed to overcome those barriers. Additionally, the plan serves broader populations such as veterans, unemployed workers, and all job seekers who benefit from basic career services like job referrals and labor market information, ensuring the workforce system supports both individuals with barriers and those without barriers in achieving sustainable employment and career growth.

Alignment of Workforce, Education, and State Investments

A central component of Mississippi's workforce strategy is aligning federal workforce programs, education systems, and state workforce investments to ensure resources are directed toward training programs that lead to quality employment opportunities. Historically, workforce funding streams have often operated independently, with limited coordination across programs. Through AccelerateMS,

Mississippi is working to align funding authorized under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and key state workforce investments to support a unified workforce strategy. In 2025, Mississippi invested \$1.5 million to enhance workforce data and grant management systems used by AccelerateMS and the Mississippi Department of Employment Security. These systems now allow the state to track workforce participants, training investments, and employment outcomes across multiple workforce funding streams, enabling policymakers to evaluate workforce investments and program outcomes in near real time.

Mississippi established a priority occupations framework to guide workforce investments. Using labor market data and economic analysis, the state identifies occupations that meet key criteria, including strong employer demand, sustainable wages, and relevance across multiple regional industry ecosystems. Workforce and education investments are increasingly directed toward programs that prepare individuals for these priority occupations. In addition to federal workforce programs, Mississippi has aligned several major state investments with this framework, including:

- Workforce Enhancement Training (WET) Funds
- Mississippi Works Funds
- EquipMS investments in K-12 programs

These investments support training programs across sectors, including advanced manufacturing, construction, healthcare, information technology, logistics, and shipbuilding, and fund approximately \$25 million annually.

Mississippi is also working to better align Perkins and WIOA planning processes to ensure that education and workforce programs operate as part of a coordinated system. By strengthening collaboration between education agencies, workforce partners, and employers, Mississippi is working to ensure that individuals have clear pathways from education and training programs into employment in high-demand occupations. This coordinated approach allows Mississippi to deploy workforce resources more strategically while reducing duplication and improving outcomes for participants.

By aligning federal workforce programs, education systems, and state workforce investments, Mississippi can deploy workforce resources more strategically and respond more quickly to the needs of employers and job seekers. Through Workflex authority, the state seeks to reduce unnecessary administrative barriers and provide greater flexibility in how workforce resources are coordinated and deployed, while maintaining strong accountability for outcomes and responsible stewardship of federal workforce investments.

Workforce Infrastructure and Service Delivery Modernization

Mississippi is modernizing the way workforce services are delivered in order to make it easier for individuals and employers to access workforce programs and training opportunities. WIOA Partners are working to expand access to workforce services by strengthening both physical and digital workforce infrastructure. Workforce hubs, virtual services, and mobile service delivery models are

being deployed to reach individuals in rural and underserved communities. Mississippi is also investing in improvements to its workforce technology systems to better connect job seekers with employment opportunities. The state's MS Works platform and other workforce technology tools are being enhanced to provide enhanced ability to connect training program participant data to outcomes.

Career coaching is another key component of Mississippi's service delivery model. Through statewide career coaching initiatives, Mississippi is working to ensure that students and adults have access to high-quality career guidance aligned with the state's priority occupations and industry needs. These efforts are designed to improve labor force participation, reduce barriers to employment, and ensure that individuals across Mississippi have access to the information and training opportunities needed to connect to quality jobs.

Mississippi also recognizes that workforce service delivery must continue to evolve alongside the needs of employers and job seekers. While the traditional One-Stop delivery system has played an important role in coordinating workforce services, the state is working to complement this model by strengthening partnerships with training providers, apprenticeship sponsors, and employers. As Mississippi expands apprenticeship and other earn-and-learn training opportunities, workforce services increasingly occur closer to where training and employment take place, including community colleges, apprenticeship training sites, and employer worksites connected to high-demand industries. These models rely less on traditional brick-and-mortar service locations and more on workforce navigation, recruitment, retention support, and direct connections to training and employment opportunities. By modernizing its workforce infrastructure and leveraging technology, Mississippi aims to ensure that a greater share of workforce investments can be directed toward training, career coaching, and participant support services while strengthening pathways into high-quality, in-demand careers.

As part of its workforce system modernization and Workflex planning efforts, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security is exploring a service delivery model that prioritizes co-location with education and training providers rather than traditional state agency offices. While coordination with government partners remains essential, virtual access enables strong interagency collaboration without requiring shared physical space. Embedding workforce staff within community colleges and training centers allows customers to directly access skills programs, enhancing the effectiveness of the workforce system. This approach also advances a comprehensive talent solutions framework in which federal workforce funds are aligned across the talent pipeline – recruiting individuals into career pathways, retaining participants through engagement in education and training programs, and placing skilled individuals into employment while virtual partnerships ensure continued access to supportive services and interagency resources.

Mississippi is actively modernizing service delivery by expanding virtual and mobile service options that make employment support more accessible, efficient, and responsive to the needs of residents across the state. Through the Mississippi Works (MS Works) integrated system, job seekers and employers can access key services such as job search, application submission, resume building, labor

market information, and workforce program enrollment via web and mobile platforms, allowing users to connect with services from anywhere at any time. The MS Works mobile app serves as a convenient gateway to these resources, enabling individuals to manage their job search and employment profile on their phone or tablet. Additionally, the state has deployed a new Mobile WIN Job Center, a fully equipped unit that travels to communities without brick-and-mortar centers, providing on-site staff assistance, a technology workstation, and employment training resources in rural and underserved areas. Mississippi is also piloting interactive digital access tools with live video support at partner locations to further extend virtual access, and workforce partners are linked through electronic referral systems and data hubs to streamline case management and coordination of services. These innovations collectively enhance service reach, reduce barriers associated with geography or transportation, and support a more flexible and model workforce delivery system.

Mississippi Workflex Plan

Mississippi is requesting Workflex authority in order to further strengthen the state's ability to implement its workforce strategy and improve coordination across workforce programs. Mississippi recognizes that Workflex authority does not alter core statutory protections within WIOA and does not waive participant eligibility requirements, performance accountability provisions, or other statutory safeguards. Workflex authority would allow Mississippi to reduce administrative barriers that can limit the efficient use of workforce resources and enable the state to better align federal workforce programs with its broader workforce strategy.

Through Workflex authority, Mississippi seeks to expand flexibility in several key areas, including:

- Use of adult and dislocated worker funds for incumbent worker training
- 75 percent out-of-school youth (OSY) expenditure requirements
- Modifying in-school and out-of-school youth expenditure target calculation

- Modifying training requirements for dislocated workers' needs-related payments
- Providing in-school youth with individual training accounts
- Extending post-exit supportive services beyond 12 months
- Increasing on-the-job training employer reimbursement
- Youth program Elements
- Income eligibility for in-school youth (ISY)

Mississippi's Workflex Plan utilizes these flexibilities to create a more responsive, employer-driven workforce system by reducing rigid federal requirements and allowing local areas to better align with participant and labor market needs. Flexibility in the use of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds for incumbent worker training supports layoff aversion and skill advancement for current employees, while adjustments to the 75 percent out-of-school youth expenditure requirement and modifications to in-school and out-of-school youth calculations enable a more balanced investment in both

prevention and re-engagement strategies. Additional waivers expand access and effectiveness of services by allowing in-school youth to utilize individual training accounts, easing eligibility for income-based reimbursement rates. Modifications to needs-related payment requirements and extensions of support services beyond 12 months improve training access and long-term employment retention for dislocated workers. Finally, flexibility in youth program elements allows for more streamlined, locally tailored service delivery. Collectively, these waivers strengthen Mississippi’s ability to meet workforce demands, support participants more effectively, and drive improved employment outcomes in the state.

Mississippi Workforce Flexibility Framework

Workflex Flexibility	Intended Impact for Mississippi	WIOA Performance Indicators Advanced
Alignment of workforce funding streams	Provides \$5–10 million annually for high-demand sector training services, supporting 500–1,500 additional credentialed workers per year. 2-Year Total: \$10–20 million aligned; 1,000 – 3,000 additional workers credentialed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credential Attainment Rate • Employment Rate (Q2 & Q4) • Median Earnings (Q2)
Improved coordination	Aligns career pathways statewide and provides flexible funding support, enabling 20–30% faster transitions from training to employment and serving 2,000+ co-enrolled participants annually. 2-Year Total: 4,000+ co-enrolled participants served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Rate (Q2 & Q4) • Credential Attainment Rate • Measurable Skill Gains • Effectiveness in Serving Employers
Modernization of workforce models	Expands virtual/mobile access and co-location with training providers, increasing rural and underserved reach by 15–25% annually and reducing average service time by 10–15%. 2-Year Total: 30–50% cumulative reach expansion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Rate (Q2 & Q4) • Measurable Skill Gains • Effectiveness in Serving Employers
Expanded use of innovative training approaches	Scales work-based learning and accelerated credentials to support 1,000–1,800 additional participants annually, improving completion rates by 10–20% and placement rates by 8–15%. 2-Year Total: 2,000–3,600 additional participants served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credential Attainment Rate • Measurable Skill Gains • Employment Rate (Q2 & Q4) • Median Earnings (Q2) • Effectiveness in Serving Employers

Workflex Administration and Implementation

Mississippi has undertaken significant efforts to modernize and align its workforce system in recent years. Through the creation of AccelerateMS and subsequent efforts to align programs, leadership, and statewide strategy, Mississippi has established a coordinated approach to workforce development that brings workforce programs, education systems, data, and economic development initiatives into alignment around shared priorities.

These efforts have resulted in a workforce system that is increasingly data-driven, employer-informed, and focused on measurable outcomes. Mississippi has established a statewide workforce performance scorecard, implemented a priority-occupations framework to guide workforce investments, and strengthened collaboration among workforce agencies, education providers, and industry partners. These structural improvements position Mississippi to responsibly administer Workflex authority while maintaining strong accountability for program performance. Local Workforce Development Boards will remain responsible for ensuring that any approved flexibilities are implemented in accordance with federal program requirements.

Workflex authority will allow Mississippi to build on these efforts by providing additional flexibility in deploying workforce resources strategically while maintaining oversight and performance accountability. Mississippi has established a clear governance structure in which the Workflex authority will be incorporated to administer responsibly, transparently, and in alignment with the state's workforce strategy, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and associated federal regulations. Governor Reeves holds ultimate authority for the state's workforce system and the administration of federal workforce programs authorized under WIOA and has designated AccelerateMS as the coordinator of workforce strategy and implementation across the state.

AccelerateMS operates under the strategic oversight of the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB), which advises the Governor on workforce policy and ensures workforce investments align with industry demand and the state's economic priorities. Under this structure, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security's (MDES) Office of Grant Management, working with the State Workforce Investment Board and AccelerateMS, will administer the Workflex program on behalf of the Governor by receiving and reviewing requests for flexibility from Local Workforce Development Areas, evaluating those requests for alignment with the state's workforce strategy, and providing recommendations to the SWIB. As the Governor's designated recipient of WIOA Title I funds, the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) serves as the state's administrative and fiscal agent for all Title I programs. MDES retains responsibility for federal reporting, fiscal controls, monitoring, and compliance with all WIOA statutory and regulatory requirements. Workflex implementation will operate within this existing structure.

Acting as the Governor's designee, the SWIB will review and approve eligible flexibility requests. MDES will then oversee implementation, monitoring, and reporting on approved flexibilities to ensure compliance with federal requirements and alignment with statewide workforce goals. Within this structure, MDES remains the official administrative authority over WIOA Title I programs, while AccelerateMS directs statewide strategy and SWIB provides policy oversight and approval of Workflex requests. This governance structure ensures that Workflex authority is administered in a coordinated manner that aligns workforce investments with the statewide strategy established by AccelerateMS. Mississippi will track outcomes associated with Workflex implementation, evaluate the effectiveness of approved flexibilities, and share lessons learned with federal partners and workforce stakeholders to help inform ongoing workforce system improvement.

Workflex Governance Workflow

Local Area → MDES (initial review) → AccelerateMS (strategy alignment review) → SWIB (final approval) → MDES (implementation + monitoring)

Local Flexibility Request Process

Workflex authority will allow Mississippi to provide targeted flexibility to Local Workforce Development Areas when doing so supports improved workforce outcomes or addresses specific regional workforce challenges. Local Workforce Development Areas seeking flexibility must submit a formal request to MDES. Requests must include:

- a description of the requested flexibility,
- the statutory or regulatory requirement for which flexibility is requested,
- the workforce challenge the request is intended to address,
- an explanation of how the flexibility will expand access to services or improve workforce outcomes, and
- expected performance outcomes associated with the request.

The Mississippi Department of Employment Security's Office of Grant Management will review all requests for flexibility in consultation with AccelerateMS, the State Workforce Investment Board, and relevant workforce system partners. Requests will be evaluated for alignment with statewide workforce priorities, including the ATLAS strategy, the state's priority occupations framework, and the overall goals of Mississippi's workforce development system.

Following MDES' review, AccelerateMS will review and provide recommendations to the State Workforce Investment Board regarding approval of the requested flexibility. Acting as the Governor's designee, the State Workforce Investment Board will review the recommendations and issue determinations on requests. Approved flexibilities may be granted for a defined period of time and will be subject to ongoing monitoring and performance review. Mississippi intends to use Workflex authority not simply to waive federal requirements, but to accelerate the implementation of workforce

strategies aligned with employer demand, priority occupations, and economic development opportunities across the state. Mississippi's Workflex Plan will achieve the following:

- Program flexibility will allow Mississippi to standardize eligibility and intake processes across the state and use one coordinated service strategy instead of separate program rules. Participants will experience one workforce system, not multiple disconnected programs.
- Mississippi will redesign how services are delivered and streamline case management across programs, giving jobseekers and employers faster, more user-friendly services.
- This will allow Mississippi to shift funds toward highest-need populations or regions and invest more in training. This creates innovative support models and allows money to follow the workforce needs.
- Mississippi will pilot new workforce models and expand work-based learning and employer-led training to modernize the workforce system and response to real labor market demand.
- Lastly, this Workflex Plan will simplify compliance requirements and consolidate reporting, reducing duplicative oversight structures throughout the state and allowing more staff time to be spent on serving residents of Mississippi.

Criteria for Approving Workflex Requests

Mississippi will approve requests for flexibility when they demonstrate a clear connection to improving workforce outcomes and advancing the state's workforce strategy.

Each request will be reviewed individually to determine its alignment with Mississippi's workforce priorities. While a request is not required to satisfy every criterion listed below, it must clearly support the State's commitment to meeting labor market needs and effectively serving jobseekers and employers.

Approval determinations will be based on the extent to which the request:

- Aligns with the State's Priority Occupations Framework and documented labor market needs
- Supports high-demand industries and strategic economic development initiatives
- Expands access to workforce training, employment, and career advancement services, particularly for underserved populations
- Reduces administrative or regulatory barriers that limit program efficiency, service integration, or participant success
- Demonstrates strong potential to improve participant outcomes, including employment, earnings, credential attainment, or career progression
- Enhances employer engagement and sector partnership efforts to better align talent development with workforce demand

Special consideration may be given to flexibility requests that support workforce development in critical sectors such as advanced manufacturing, shipbuilding and defense manufacturing, healthcare, construction, logistics, and emerging technology industries. This approach ensures that Workflex

authority is used strategically to support workforce initiatives that strengthen Mississippi's economy while expanding opportunity for residents.

Monitoring and Compliance

Mississippi is committed to ensuring that Workflex authority is implemented responsibly and in accordance with federal requirements. MDES will monitor all activities conducted under Workflex authority through existing program monitoring processes used for WIOA programs to ensure consistency, accountability, and program integrity. Mississippi has the administrative infrastructure, staffing, and data systems necessary to produce and submit comprehensive monitoring reports on a quarterly basis, enabling timely review of program performance, fiscal compliance, and implementation progress. Monitoring activities may include:

- desk reviews of program activities,
- performance monitoring and data analysis,
- financial monitoring and compliance reviews, and
- periodic reporting requirements for Local Workforce Development Areas.

Monitoring and oversight efforts will also assess whether approved flexibilities are improving workforce outcomes and expanding access to training and employment opportunities for participants and employers. If monitoring activities identify concerns regarding the use of Workflex authority, MDES may require corrective action, modify the scope of the approved flexibility, or, if necessary, recommend the revocation of approval to the SWIB. These monitoring procedures ensure that flexibility is used responsibly while maintaining the integrity of workforce programs and supporting continuous improvement in the workforce system.

Performance Measurement and Accountability

Mississippi will measure the impact of Workflex authority using performance indicators aligned with the state's workforce strategy. MDES will track outcomes including:

- employment placement rates,
- credential attainment,
- participation and completion in priority occupation training programs,
- wage outcomes for program participants, and
- employer engagement in workforce programs.

These measures will be incorporated into the statewide workforce performance scorecard developed through the ATLAS strategy. The scorecard provides policymakers and workforce leaders with a consistent framework for evaluating overall workforce performance and ensuring that workforce investments produce measurable results.

Mississippi will also use these measures to assess whether the flexibilities authorized under Workflex are improving workforce system effectiveness and expanding access to employment and training opportunities.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Mississippi will evaluate the implementation and outcomes of Workflex authority on an ongoing basis to determine whether flexibility is improving workforce system performance. The MDES Office of Grant Management will conduct periodic evaluations of Workflex activities and provide updates to the Governor, the State Workforce Investment Board, AccelerateMS, and relevant workforce partners. These evaluations will assess:

- whether Workflex authority has improved access to workforce services,
- the effectiveness of training programs supported through flexibility,
- impacts on employment outcomes and wage growth, and
- opportunities to further improve workforce system performance.

Mississippi will also evaluate whether Workflex authority is improving the workforce system by comparing baseline and post-implementation performance across WIOA Primary Indicators such as employment rates, credential attainment, measurable skills gains, median earnings, and effectiveness in serving employers while also tracking changes in service access, participant co-enrollment, and time-to-employment as well as impact on connection to quality jobs. The state can supplement performance data with quarterly trend analyses, customer and employer satisfaction surveys, and cost-efficiency metrics to determine whether flexibilities are producing measurable system improvements. Findings would inform continuous improvement decisions led by AccelerateMS in coordination with the Mississippi State Workforce Investment Board.

Findings from these evaluations will be used to inform future workforce policy decisions and ensure that Mississippi continues to strengthen the effectiveness of its workforce system. Further, The MDES Office of Grant Management, will provide an annual summary of Workflex implementation and outcomes to the Governor, the SWIB, and the U.S. Department of Labor. Through this approach, Mississippi intends to demonstrate how strategic use of flexibility can improve workforce outcomes while maintaining strong accountability for public resources and contributing insights that may inform broader workforce system improvements.

Workforce System Governance and State Capacity

Mississippi has established a strong governance structure to support the implementation of its workforce strategy and ensure effective oversight of workforce programs. AccelerateMS serves as the state's central coordinating entity for workforce development policy and strategy. Created by the Governor and supported by the Legislature, AccelerateMS works closely with the State Workforce Investment Board, workforce agencies, education partners, and employers to align workforce investments and drive system improvement.

The State Workforce Investment Board plays a key role in providing oversight and strategic guidance for the workforce system. The Board works with state leaders and business leaders to establish priorities, monitor performance, and ensure accountability across workforce programs. This same

collaboration moved a \$20M state fund from funding basic safety and fire drills to collaborative robots and human capital infrastructure capable of supporting today and tomorrow's companies. AccelerateMS also maintains strong partnerships with agencies responsible for administering workforce programs, including the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, the Mississippi Community College Board, local community colleges, the Mississippi Department of Education, and other training and workforce partners. Together, these entities work collaboratively to implement the state's workforce strategy, align funding across programs, and track outcomes using statewide data systems and performance scorecards.

Mississippi is committed to applying this same disciplined approach to the implementation of Workflex authority. The State will continue to maintain strong oversight of workforce programs, monitor performance outcomes, and implement approved flexibilities in a manner that preserves fiscal integrity and responsible stewardship of federal and state workforce investments while improving employment outcomes for workers and meeting the workforce needs of employers.

Accountability and Responsible Stewardship

Mississippi recognizes that workforce development programs represent a significant investment of public resources and is committed to ensuring that these investments produce measurable outcomes for participants and employers. Mississippi has implemented a performance-driven approach to workforce policy that emphasizes data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement. Workforce investments are increasingly guided by performance metrics that measure outcomes such as employment placement, wage progression, credential attainment, and alignment with priority occupations.

The state is also working to strengthen data integration across workforce and education programs in order to improve accountability and transparency. Mississippi's workforce data infrastructure, including the State Longitudinal Data System, allows policymakers and workforce leaders to track participant outcomes and evaluate the effectiveness of workforce programs.

Mississippi remains committed to maintaining strong fiscal oversight and ensuring that workforce funds are used responsibly. The state will continue to monitor program performance, evaluate outcomes, and implement improvements as necessary to ensure that workforce programs deliver meaningful results.

National Workforce System Demonstration Opportunity

The next generation of workforce policy must empower states to innovate while maintaining strong accountability for outcomes. Across the country, states are working to modernize workforce development systems to respond more effectively to rapidly changing labor market conditions, technological change, and evolving employer workforce needs. However, many workforce programs

continue to operate under administrative structures that were designed for earlier workforce environments.

Mississippi has already demonstrated a commitment to aligning State and Federally funded workforce programs with industry demand, strengthening partnerships with employers, and improving coordination across workforce and education systems. By granting Mississippi Workflex authority, the U.S. Department of Labor has an opportunity to support a state that is actively working to modernize its workforce system and test new approaches to workforce program administration. Mississippi stands ready to serve as a national demonstration state for workforce system innovation, demonstrating how greater flexibility can improve workforce outcomes, strengthen economic competitiveness, and expand opportunity for workers.

Mississippi intends to use Workflex authority to pilot innovative approaches in several areas of workforce system modernization, including:

- Alignment of workforce and education investments around priority occupations
- Expansion of employer-driven workforce training programs
- Modernization of workforce service delivery through virtual and mobile service models
- Integration of workforce data systems and labor exchange platforms
- Improved coordination across federal, state, and local workforce programs

These efforts are designed to strengthen the connection between education, workforce training, and employment while improving outcomes for both workers and employers. Governor Reeves is committed to maintaining strong federal accountability requirements while implementing these innovative workforce strategies. The State will monitor program performance, evaluate outcomes, and share lessons learned through the implementation of these initiatives.

Through this effort, Mississippi seeks to demonstrate how a coordinated, demand-driven workforce system can improve economic mobility for individuals while strengthening the competitiveness of the state's economy. By serving as a demonstration state for workforce system modernization, Mississippi hopes to contribute insights that can inform future federal workforce policy and support the development of more flexible and responsive workforce systems across the nation. Mississippi welcomes the opportunity to partner with the U.S. Department of Labor to demonstrate how greater workforce system flexibility can improve employment outcomes, strengthen employer partnerships, and expand economic opportunity for workers across the country.

Conclusion

Mississippi leadership is committed to building a workforce system that expands opportunity for its residents while supporting the needs of employers and strengthening the state's economy. Under the leadership of Governor Tate Reeves and in partnership with the Mississippi Legislature and the State Workforce Investment Board, the state has taken deliberate steps to modernize and better align

workforce programs, education systems, and economic development initiatives around a shared goal: helping more Mississippians connect to quality jobs that support long-term economic mobility.

Through the creation of AccelerateMS and the implementation of dedicated strategies and increased accountability, Mississippi has established a coordinated workforce system that prioritizes employer demand, aligns investments with priority occupations, and focuses on measurable outcomes for individuals and communities. These efforts reflect the state's commitment to using workforce resources responsibly while ensuring that training programs lead to real opportunities for workers and sustainable growth for employers.

Governor Reeves views Workflex authority as an opportunity to further strengthen this work. By providing states with greater flexibility to administer workforce programs, the U.S. Department of Labor enables innovation while maintaining strong accountability for results. Mississippi intends to use this authority to accelerate workforce responses to economic development opportunities, expand access to training in high-demand occupations, and test new service delivery models that improve access to workforce programs for individuals across the state.

The state looks forward to continuing its partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor as these efforts move forward. Mississippi stands ready to demonstrate how strategic flexibility, strong governance, and close collaboration with employers and education partners can produce meaningful workforce outcomes and expand economic opportunities for workers. Through this partnership, Mississippi aims to contribute to the development of workforce policies and practices that strengthen the nation's workforce system while helping more Americans connect to quality employment.

Appendix: WIOA Waiver Requests

Mississippi is submitting a series of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) waiver requests to the U.S. Department of Labor to support the continued modernization, alignment, and effectiveness of the State's workforce development system. These waivers are designed to provide flexibility within federal requirements so that Mississippi can better respond to labor market demands, support jobseekers, and strengthen employer engagement.

All proposed waivers included in this appendix were previously made available for public comment. Feedback received during the public comment period was reviewed and incorporated, as appropriate, prior to submission.

The State's waiver requests are organized into three categories:

Governance Waivers

These waivers focus on strengthening system leadership, streamlining governance structures, and modernizing service delivery. They support a more agile workforce system by improving board composition flexibility, expanding training delivery options, and enabling innovative approaches to one-stop service access, including virtual and mobile models.

Funding Flexibility Waivers

These waivers provide the State with greater ability to align funding with strategic priorities and real-time workforce needs. They support a more integrated system by reducing program silos, allowing flexible use of statewide funds, improving infrastructure funding approaches, and expanding investment in employer-driven training strategies.

Program Waivers

These waivers enhance the State's ability to serve participants effectively by increasing flexibility in program design and service delivery. They support improved outcomes by expanding access to training, strengthening supportive services, adjusting performance expectations, and better aligning youth and adult services with employer demand.

Collectively, these waivers advance Mississippi's goals of building an industry-driven, integrated, and accountable workforce system that improves employment outcomes, supports economic growth, and meets the evolving needs of employers and jobseekers.

State Workforce Development Board Membership

PURPOSE OF THE WAIVER

This waiver seeks to provide Mississippi greater flexibility in streamlining State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) membership, ensuring members are effectively recruited, engaged, and appropriately representative of key constituencies.

SWDBs serve a critical function in overseeing workforce development activities and partnering with the Governor to provide leadership. WIOA currently outlines specific, prescriptive requirements regarding SWDB membership and the ratios of employers, organized labor representatives, and workforce program representatives.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

Indiana, Michigan

STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR WAIVER

WIOA Section 101(b)(1), Section 101(b)(3) and (c) and 20 CFR 679.110(b)-(c)

The State is requesting a waiver for the following SWDB membership requirements:

1. At least 20% of members must represent workers, including:
 - a. One member nominated by State labor federations
 - b. One member representing a labor organization or a training director from a joint labor-management apprenticeship program, or a representative of an apprenticeship program in the State
2. One board member cannot represent multiple categories.

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Industry-Driven Strategies (Strategic Pillar I):** Responsive, flexible board membership will ensure stronger employer and industry leadership and prioritize real-time labor market demand over rigid statutory ratios. Flexibility in response to local conditions will improve the industry relevance of workforce policies and investments, ensuring training and credential strategies align with high-growth sectors and priority industries and enhance responsiveness to regional and sector-specific needs, allowing boards to engage employers who reflect the state's economic landscape and talent demands. Ultimately, allowing flexibility in the board's membership will increase employer engagement and

accountability, ensuring business members are actively involved in setting priorities, and engaged employers can more effectively shape career pathways, work-based learning, and sector partnerships.

- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** Allowing flexibility in the state’s workforce board membership will provide a strong, effective SWDB capable of providing strategic oversight and improved cross-system alignment among workforce, education, economic development, and labor partners. It will also foster streamlined decision-making that allows the board to be more responsive to state and regional labor market needs and eliminate program silos by adopting a systemic approach for employers, workers, job seekers, and students.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

Mississippi has continually worked to recruit and retain members to ensure compliance with WIOA. Further, legislative and executive actions in the State have moved toward an integrated system where a streamlined SWDB reflects a more strategic approach.

STATE’S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver supports the State’s strategic goals by strengthening workforce system governance and enhancing the effectiveness of the SWDB. By providing flexibility to streamline SWDB membership, the State can recruit and engage members who are better aligned with current economic conditions, priority industries, and workforce needs, ensuring informed and timely decision-making. The waiver enables the Board to function more strategically by reducing prescriptive constraints and allowing a more balanced, representative composition that reflects key stakeholders. As a result, the State can improve leadership, policy alignment, and oversight of workforce programs, supporting a more responsive, employer-informed, and outcomes-driven workforce development system.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. **A more efficient and strategic board** focused on system-wide issues, as measured by board member satisfaction
2. **Greater board productivity and reduced member turnover**, as measured by board member tenure
3. **Enhanced focus on performance and systemic outcomes**, measured by system metrics and continuous improvement efforts
4. **Consistent statewide customer experience** with flexibility for local labor market needs, as seen in improved programmatic outcomes

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

This waiver primarily impacts state-level workforce governance and system stakeholders by providing flexibility to streamline SWDB membership. It allows for more adaptable recruitment and engagement of board members, ensuring the board is effectively representative of key constituencies. Local workforce development boards and program participants indirectly benefit from a more efficiently structured and engaged SWDB, which can provide stronger leadership, oversight, and guidance. Employers, organized labor, and workforce program representatives also gain from improved board effectiveness, as their perspectives are more meaningfully included in decision-making. Overall, the waiver strengthens the governance of the workforce system while indirectly enhancing outcomes for the individuals and employers it serves.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

The State will maintain records of board meetings, board policies and procedures, and board decisions, including records of member nominations, turnover, and new member training. The State will report on this waiver as part of monitoring with USDOL.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

The State posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Training Services to be Provided through Contracts

PURPOSE OF THE WAIVER

The purpose of this waiver is to allow all training services to be delivered through training contracts rather than being limited primarily to Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). This flexibility enables the state to better align training investments with industry demand, sector partnerships, and employer-driven workforce strategies. By utilizing training contracts, the state can support cohort-based models, customized training, apprenticeship expansion, and partnerships with high-demand industries where ITAs may be effective or administratively burdensome. The waiver promoted efficiency, improves responsiveness to labor market needs, and enhances access to high-quality training opportunities while maintaining accountability for performance outcomes under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

None

STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE WAIVER

WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(F)(i) and the associated regulations at **20 CFR 680.320(a)**

This waiver specifically related to the provision in WIOA implementing regulations that require training services for adults and dislocated workers to be delivered primarily through Individual Training Accounts, while limited the use of training contracts to define exceptions.

- WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(F)(i) states:
 - Training services for adults and dislocated workers be provided through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), except in limited circumstance
 - Identifies exceptions under which training contracts may be used instead of ITAs

A waiver of these provisions allows Mississippi to expand the use of training contracts beyond the limited exceptions established in statute and regulation, while still operating within federal performance accountability and oversight requirements.

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

The rationale for waiver is to allow all training services to be delivered through training contracts rather than being limited primarily to Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). This flexibility enables the state to respond more effectively to employer demand, implement sector-based and cohort training models, expand work-based learning, and streamline administration. Training contracts can better support customized training, partnerships with industry associations,

apprenticeship expansion, and rapid upskilling initiatives in high-growth sectors where ITAs may be less practical.

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Industry-Driven Strategies (Strategic Pillar I):** Training contracts allow the state to work directly with employers and industry partnerships to design programs aligned with real-time labor market needs, ensuring training leads to in-demand occupations.
- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** By aligning training to high-growth sectors and recognized credentials, the waiver supports participants in obtaining quality jobs with advancement opportunities, increasing long-term earnings and career progression.
- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** Training contracts facilitate coordinated efforts among workforce agencies, community colleges, economic development partners, and employers, promoting a more unified and efficient workforce system.
- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** The state will continue to track federal performance indicators under WIOA, ensuring that expanded use of training contracts maintains strong outcomes in employment, credential attainment, and measurable skill gains.
- **Flexibility and Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** The waiver provides local areas the flexibility to implement innovative training strategies, such as cohort-based models, sector academies, and rapid response upskilling initiatives, while reducing administrative barriers associated with individual ITA management.

This waiver strengthens the state's ability to deliver responsive, employer aligned training while maintaining performance accountability and advancing strategic workforce goals.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

To avoid barriers, Mississippi areas must consistently implement priority of service when adult funds are limited by giving priority to veterans and eligible spouses, followed by recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient. This requires a clear written priority policy, proper documentation of eligibility (including income and basic skills deficiency), application of priority before enrollment in individualized career or training services, and ongoing monitoring to ensure adult funds are primarily serving the required statutory priority populations.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver is typically requested to support a state's broader strategic workforce goals, such as increasing access to training for in-demand industries, expanding employer engagement, accelerating credential attainment, strengthening sector partnerships, improving responsiveness to regional labor market needs, and serving a wider range of job seekers who may not meet low-

income criteria but require upskilling to obtain quality employment. The waiver can provide flexibility to align adult funding with economic development strategies, industry-driven career pathways, and statewide talent development initiatives while still maintaining a focus on serving individuals with barriers to employment.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. Increase enrollment in training aligned with in-demand industries
2. Higher credential attainment rates
3. Improved employment and wage outcomes
4. Expanded employer engagement and sector partnerships
5. Greater flexibility in serving diverse job seekers
6. Faster placement into quality, career-pathway employment

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

This waiver primarily benefits **adults and dislocated workers** served under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, particularly those who face barriers to employment or require structured, industry-aligned training to reenter the workforce. It supports individuals who may benefit more from cohort-based, customized, or employer-sponsored training models rather than self-directed Individual Training Accounts. This includes low-income adults, individuals with limited work history, displaced workers affected by layoffs or industry shifts, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and participants seeking rapid upskilling in high-demand sectors. By expanding the use of training contracts, the waiver increases access to coordinated, employer-connected training opportunities that can lead directly to recognized credentials and quality employment.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

This waiver will be monitored by the state through existing oversight and performance accountability processes under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Mississippi will track required federal performance indicators, including employment in the 2nd and 4th quarters after exit, median earnings, credential attainment, measurable skill gains, and effectiveness in serving employers. Programmatic and fiscal monitoring of local workforce areas will include review of training contracts, participant eligibility, procurement procedures, and cost allowability to ensure compliance with federal and state requirements. Mississippi will also conduct data validation, desk reviews, and on-site monitoring to assess whether training contracts are aligned with industry demand and producing positive outcomes. Any identified issues will be addressed through technical assistance or corrective action to maintain accountability and program integrity.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

The State posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Maintaining a Comprehensive One-Stop Center

PURPOSE OF THE WAIVER

This waiver removes the requirement that each local workforce development area maintain at least one physical comprehensive one-stop center. This waiver is intended to provide Mississippi and its local areas with the flexibility to modernize the delivery of workforce services by transitioning from a rigid, building-centric model to a more agile system of virtual access points, mobile service units, and specialized technology hubs. By removing the mandate for a traditional comprehensive physical location in every local area, Mississippi can reallocate significant infrastructure and facility resources toward high-wage employment outcomes and direct participant services, ensuring that the system delivers important skills-upgrading services to meet the demands of a high-technology economy.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

None

STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE WAIVER

WIOA Section 121(e)(1), WIOA Section 121(e)(2)(A), and the associated regulations at 20 CFR 678.300(c) and 678.305

These provisions mandate the establishment of a one-stop delivery system in each local area and that such system make all programs, services, and activities accessible at not less than one physical center in each local area. This waiver would allow the State and LWDBs to align services in ways that increase access points and consolidate physical infrastructure in alignment with service delivery integration.

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** This request ensures that spending on direct training and worker mobility initiatives is prioritized over high overhead costs associated with underutilized physical facilities. Institutionalizing a more flexible delivery model allows the State to ensure that infrastructure funding is used to support an efficient workforce development system and braid funds toward that end.
- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III) and Flexibility and Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** This request aligns with the State's modernization goals by allowing the State to bypass prescriptive requirements that favor brick-and-mortar investments over service quality. In many regions, particularly rural or digitally-

integrated areas, the maintenance of a full-scale comprehensive center is an inefficient use of resources that often creates a maze of physical locations rather than a streamlined customer experience. By waiving the mandatory physical center requirement, the State can develop additional physical and virtual access points to the one-stop system that allow participants to access all six core programs and human services using a variety of options.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

Mississippi has conducted a statewide assessment of its one-stop network to identify locations where virtual or mobile service delivery would better serve the community than a fixed physical center. Furthermore, the State is developing standardized intake and case management protocols that ensure there is no loss of service quality during this transition. Mississippi is aligning its administrative framework to manage a more cohesive, statewide virtual delivery system.

MISSISSIPPI'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver supports the Mississippi's strategic goals by modernizing the workforce system and aligning service delivery with the realities of a high-technology, rapidly changing economy. With this waiver, Mississippi gains flexibility to deploy virtual platforms, mobile service units, and technology-enabled hubs, expanding access while reducing costly and underutilized infrastructure. The waiver allows Mississippi to redirect resources from facility maintenance to direct participant services, such as skills training, credential attainment, and career advancement in high-wage, in-demand industries. It also supports statewide goals related to innovation, efficiency, and equitable access, ensuring services reach individuals where they live and work while strengthening the system's ability to respond to employer needs and evolving labor market demands.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. A **measurable reduction in statewide infrastructure expenditures**, with a goal of reallocating at least 15 percent of those savings into direct participant training services and Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).
2. Increased labor force participation in rural and underserved areas as measured by a **higher rate of service engagement** through new access points, mobile services, and virtual hubs.
3. **Elimination of 100 percent of administrative findings** related to local area non-compliance with the physical "comprehensive" center standard.

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

The primary beneficiaries of this waiver are job seekers and students who currently face transportation or geographic barriers to reaching a physical one-stop center. Employers also benefit from a more agile system that can deploy mobile talent recruitment units directly to worksites or provide virtual talent matching tools that operate 24/7. Finally, the workforce system's administrative staff will benefit from a reduction in the time spent managing complex facility leases and infrastructure negotiations, allowing them to focus on high-touch career coaching and industry-led strategies.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Mississippi will monitor the effectiveness of this transition through its centralized performance management system, tracking participant engagement and outcomes via physical, virtual, and mobile access points. The LWDB will conduct annual reviews of the integrated service delivery model to ensure it meets one-stop certification standards and maintains full programmatic and physical accessibility in accordance with WIOA Section 188. Periodic reports on cost savings and their reallocation to direct services will be provided to USDOL.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Consolidating WIOA Title I Funding as a Block Grant

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

This waiver allows Mississippi to combine WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth funding streams into a single, flexible funding pool administered at the state level rather than separate formula-funded program streams. This flexibility supports an integrated, outcome-driven workforce development system.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

None

THE STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS WAIVER

WIOA Sections 128 and 133 and the associated regulations at **20 CFR 681 and 683**

This waiver address provisions that address the following:

1. Establishes the youth and adult and dislocated worker formula funding and within-State allocation requirements for Title I Youth Program, including:
 - a. Funding allotments and allocations
 - b. State reservations
 - c. Local youth services
 - d. Eligibility and priorities
2. Governor may reserve a portion of the funding for statewide activities, such as rapid response, statewide employment and training efforts, or statewide evaluation

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** This flexibility allows workforce service to be designed around the needs of jobseekers and employers, supporting seamless service delivery without barriers created by separate funding sources.
- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** This waiver eliminates silos between WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs by combining funding streams into a single pool, enabling a unified and coordinated workforce development system.

- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** This waiver shifts the system’s focus from program compliance to achieving measurable outcomes, such as employment, credential attainment, and earnings growth, across all populations served.
- **Flexibility & Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** By consolidating Title I funds, the State gains the flexibility to allocate resources based on real-time labor market needs and strategic priorities rather than rigid, program-specific funding formulas.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

Mississippi has aligned Title I services within existing statutory constraints, including issuing unified statewide policies, implementing common intake and assessment processes, aligning career pathways across programs, and encouraging co-enrollment where permissible.

The State has also centralized performance management, monitoring, and fiscal oversight and has worked to braid Title I resources with SNAP Employment and Training, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and other workforce-related funding streams. Despite these efforts, the requirement to maintain separate Title I funding streams continues to create artificial administrative barriers that limit flexibility and responsiveness.

STATE’S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver aligns closely with Mississippi’s strategic workforce goals by strengthening system coordination, improving responsiveness to labor market needs, and maximizing the impact of limited resources. By consolidating WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth funding, Mississippi advances its goal of **building an integrated workforce system** that operates as a single network rather than separate programs. The added flexibility supports the State’s objective to **respond quickly to employer demand and economic changes**, ensuring investments are aligned with high-growth industries and in-demand occupations. The waiver also reinforces the State’s focus on **outcomes and accountability** by allowing resources to be directed toward strategies that improve employment, credential attainment, and earnings. Finally, by reducing administrative burden and duplicative processes, the waiver supports the State’s goal of **efficient stewardship of public funds** while improving customer-centered service delivery for jobseekers and employers.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. **Stronger performance** within and scaling of effective programs, such as Registered Apprenticeship, OJT, and sector-based training models
2. **Improved service delivery** by enabling a truly participant-centered approach to workforce services

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

This waiver benefits job seekers and program participants, who will receive services based on their needs and career goals rather than on which Title I funding stream they qualify for at intake. It also benefits employers, who benefit from a system that can deploy training and hiring solutions without navigating program-specific limitations. A consolidated funding model allows the State to respond more effectively to employer-driven initiatives, layoff aversion efforts, and rapid response activities that often involve mixed populations.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Mississippi will monitor waiver implementation through centralized fiscal oversight, program monitoring, and performance reporting systems. Mississippi will maintain the ability to track expenditures, participant characteristics, and outcomes in a manner sufficient to meet all federal reporting requirements and to demonstrate compliance with statutory protections.

Mississippi will evaluate the impact of consolidated Title I funding on service delivery efficiency, outcomes, and fiscal integrity and will report on these impacts through the WIOA Annual Report and other required reporting mechanisms.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

State Infrastructure Funding Model

PURPOSE OF THE WAIVER

This waiver allows for the immediate implementation of a statewide infrastructure funding model without the prerequisite of a local impasse. Currently, the law requires local areas to first attempt to reach an agreement via a local funding mechanism (LFM) and only permits the state funding mechanism (SFM) to be triggered when negotiations fail. This request seeks to bypass that administrative delay, allowing Mississippi to establish a consistent, equitable, and strategic funding framework for all one-stop centers from the outset of the program year. By centralizing this process, Mississippi can ensure that infrastructure costs are shared proportionally by all partners in a manner that supports a unified service delivery model rather than a fragmented, site-by-site negotiation process.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

None

STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE WAIVER

WIOA Section 121(h)(2) and the associated regulations at **20 CFR 678.715, 678.725, 678.730 and 678.735**

These provisions mandate that the SFM may only be used when local partners fail to reach an agreement on the methods of sufficiently funding the infrastructure costs of one-stop centers. This waiver permits the State to move directly to a state-governed allocation model for these costs, regardless of whether a local impasse has occurred.

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** The current LFM creates a local area-level cost allocation approach, which is inequitable and one in which partners frequently only provide minimal support. Therefore, most of the State's one-stop system is primarily funded with WIOA title I and title III funds. This encourages a fragmented and poorly funded system with WIOA title I funds disproportionately paying for administrative costs rather than participant services.
- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** Under current law, the LFM is the only tool for enforcing one-stop certification standards. Institutionalizing the SFM statewide

provides the State with the opportunity to ensure consistent standards and customer service quality are embedded in one-stop centers and the system overall.

- **Flexibility and Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** Under the current prescriptive requirements, the State and local areas spend months in complex negotiations that often result in inconsistent funding levels across different regions, thus undermining the goal of a universal customer experience. By allowing the State to determine infrastructure funding through a unified statewide model, the adversarial nature of impasse-based funding is eliminated and replaced with a transparent, formula-driven approach. This modernization effort ensures that all one-stop partners contribute their fair share based on a standardized methodology, which in turn allows the State to invest more heavily in high-tech, mobile, and virtual service access points that serve the entire population more effectively.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

Mississippi has already conducted ongoing monitoring of infrastructure costs across the existing one-stop system to identify inefficiencies and funding gaps. The SWDB has worked closely with core and required partners to develop a draft allocation formula that reflects actual usage and benefits. Mississippi is working toward streamlining governance and making the current negotiation structure obsolete and redundant in our unified administrative structure.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver request supports the State's strategic goals of and Service Delivery Integration and Financial Integration. By removing the requirement to wait for an impasse between the State and local area, the State can align infrastructure spending with its broader economic development priorities, such as the expansion of work-based learning and sector-based training. This waiver creates a predictable and auditable funding stream that is tied to system-wide performance rather than local negotiation outcomes. Ultimately, this allows the State to direct more resources away from the administrative burden of fiscal negotiations and toward direct training and worker mobility initiatives.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. A **100 percent reduction in the number of months** required to finalize infrastructure funding agreements, ensuring that all one-stop centers are fully funded and operational by the start of the program year.
2. A **measurable increase in the percentage of partner-contributed funds** directed toward shared technology and virtual services, as determined by the statewide allocation model.

3. The **elimination of 100 percent of administrative costs** associated with the local negotiation process and subsequent state-level intervention.
4. **Consistent, statewide compliance** with infrastructure funding caps and formulas, resulting in zero fiscal findings related to disproportionate partner contributions.

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

This waiver primarily impacts the administrative staff and partner agencies of the workforce system, who will see a significant reduction in the time and legal resources required to manage fiscal negotiations. A stabilized and equitable funding model ensures that centers in rural or high-poverty areas are not disadvantaged by local funding volatility, guaranteeing that all residents have access to high-quality workforce services regardless of their geographic location. This waiver impacts employers and job seekers by creating a more reliable and unified service delivery system, as infrastructure resources are allocated efficiently to support high-quality training, career services, and employment programs.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

The State will monitor the implementation of the statewide infrastructure funding model through its centralized financial reporting system. Each one-stop partner's contribution will be tracked quarterly to ensure adherence to the state-determined formula and to verify that funds are being used exclusively for allowable infrastructure costs. MDES will review these expenditures annually as part of its continuous improvement process and provide periodic reports.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Flexible Use of Governor-Reserved Funds for Employment and Training Activities

PURPOSE OF THE WAIVER

This waiver provides flexibility for the Governor to use up to 50 percent of the funds reserved for statewide rapid response activities to also support statewide employment and training activities in the first year of funding availability. This flexibility enables Mississippi to respond more effectively to emerging workforce needs, including providing training, disaster relief employment, and other critical workforce services where they are most needed.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

New York

STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS WAIVER

WIOA Sections 133(a)(2) and 134(a)(2)(A)

This waives provisions that specifically require:

1. The Governor to reserve up to 25 percent of the State's dislocated worker formula allotment
2. Funds to be reserved for statewide activities, specifically Rapid Response
3. Reservation is taken before funds are distributed to local areas
4. Purpose of the funds to ensure the State can quickly respond to layoffs, plant closures, disasters, or other events causing significant job loss

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillar:

- **Flexibility and Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** This request gives the Governor the ability to adapt the use of reserved funds to meet the rapidly changing workforce needs, which directly embodies the Flexibility and Innovation pillar by allowing funds to be deployed for employment and training services needed by participants. By allowing up to 50% of reserved funds to be used beyond traditional rapid response, the State can design innovative employment and training programs tailored to current labor market conditions. This waiver also supports new programs and promotes adaptive workforce strategies by encouraging experimentation and flexibility in service delivery to meet the emerging industry needs and unexpected workforce disruptions.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

Mississippi has reviewed policies governing the use of Governor-reserved rapid response funds to identify restrictions that limit timely investment in statewide employment and training activities. Mississippi has issued guidance and provided technical assistance to local areas and partners to support coordinated planning, streamlined approval processes for statewide initiatives, and strengthened collaboration between rapid response team and workforce program operators. These actions reduce administrative barriers and allow funds to be deployed more effectively in response to emerging workforce needs.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver supports the Mississippi's strategic goals by allowing resources to be deployed quickly and strategically in response to emerging workforce and economic needs. This flexibility enables targeted investments in training, disaster relief employment, and reemployment services, helping workers return to work faster and supporting economic recovery. Overall, the waiver strengthens the State's ability to maintain a resilient, responsive workforce system that prioritizes timely services, worker mobility, and alignment with employer and regional needs.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. **Percentage of Governor-reserved funds utilized** for statewide employment and training activities within the first year of availability
2. **Number of workers served** through statewide employment, training, or disaster relief activities funded by the waiver
3. **Enrollment in training or employment services**, measured by the number of participants entering approved programs
4. **Employment outcomes**, including the percentage of participants who obtain employment following services
5. **Time to service delivery**, measured as a reduction in the time between funding availability and participant enrollment

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

This waiver primarily benefits workers and job seekers, particularly those needing flexible employment and training services access. It also benefits employers, who gain a more responsive workforce system capable of addressing labor shortages and skill gaps quickly, and workforce program stakeholders, as the waiver allows for strategic allocation of resources to areas of greatest need.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Mississippi will monitor implementation of this waiver through existing fiscal and program oversight processes, including regular reporting on the use of Governor-reserved funds for statewide employment and training activities. Measurable outcomes will include the amount of funds expended, number of participants served, types of services provided, and employment and training outcomes achieved. Data will be reviewed to ensure funds are used as intended, support timely response to workforce needs, and inform continuous improvement and compliance with waiver conditions.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Flexible Use of Governor-Reserved Funds for Statewide Employment and Training Activities, including Disaster Relief Employment

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

This waiver allows flexibility in the use of funds reserved by the Governor for statewide activities, enabling these funds to support statewide employment and training activities, including disaster relief employment for areas affected by emergencies. This flexibility ensures that resources can be directed where they are most needed to address workforce and economic recovery needs.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

Illinois, Puerto Rico (2 waivers)

STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR WAIVER

WIOA Section 134(a)(2)(A) and (B) and 134(a)(3)

This waiver impacts provisions that:

1. Requires that local areas use Adult and Dislocated Worker formula funds to provide career services to individuals, including job search and pavement assistance, career counseling, provision of labor market information, referrals to training and support services.
2. Requires that priority for intensive and training services be given to public assistance recipients, low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic-skills deficient (for adult programs).

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** By allowing funds to support disaster relief employment and other statewide employment programs, individuals affected by emergencies or economic disruptions can quickly enter the workforce. This waiver provides transitional or temporary employment funding with opportunities for on-the-job and skills-building, helping participants move into longer-term, unsubsidized employment. The flexibility ensures that individuals in affected regions or industries

have access to employment opportunities that might not otherwise be available, supporting economic recovery and mobility.

- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** This waiver allows reserved funds to be deployed for statewide employment and training or disaster relief and encourages cross-program alignment. It also for unified delivery, promoting cohesive and centralized planning, ensuring funds reach areas of greatest need efficiently. This flexibility reduces silos, integrating emergency employment, workforce development, and recovery services under a single strategy.
- **Flexibility and Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** This waiver allows the State to coordinate disaster relief employment, based on immediate need and enables the State to implement non-traditional approaches to help affected communities recover and re-enter the workforce quickly. This waiver also ensures resources can be deployed where they are most urgently needed, such as areas affected by economic disruptions or disasters.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

Mississippi has taken steps to reduce state and local barriers by reviewing and aligning policies governing the use of Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Governor's reserve funds to support coordinated service delivery. Actions include issuing guidance and technical assistance to local areas on integrating career services, training, and rapid response activities; streamlining approval and reporting processes for statewide employment and training initiatives; and promoting collaboration across workforce partners to ensure priority populations are served efficiently. These efforts support flexible, integrated use of funds while maintaining compliance with WIOA requirements and strengthening statewide workforce system coordination.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOAL(S) SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver supports Mississippi's strategic goals by enhancing the workforce system's ability to respond quickly and effectively to emergencies and economic disruptions. By allowing Governor-reserved rapid response funds to be used for statewide employment and training activities, including disaster relief employment, Mississippi can direct resources to impacted communities without delay. This flexibility strengthens economic recovery efforts, supports displaced workers through immediate employment and skill development opportunities, and helps employers and communities rebuild. Overall, the waiver advances the State's goals of workforce resilience, rapid reemployment, and efficient use of resources to meet urgent and evolving workforce needs.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. **Number of individuals served** through statewide employment and training activities by the Governor's reserve.
2. **Percentage in participants** receiving integrated career, training, and rapid response services will increase.
3. **Number of workers served** in disaster relief employment in affected areas will increase.
4. **Employment placement rate for participants** receiving statewide employment and training services will increase.
5. **Credential or measurable skill gain rate** for participants enrolled in training activities will increase.
6. **Time from layoff or disaster event** to service delivery, measured in days, will decrease.
7. **Percentage of priority populations served will increase**, including low-income individuals and those impacted by layoffs or disasters.

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM WAIVER

This waiver primarily impacts workers and job seekers in areas affected by emergencies or economic disruptions, providing timely access to employment, training, and disaster relief opportunities. It also benefits employers, who gain access to a workforce trained and ready to support recovery and business continuity, and workforce system stakeholders, including state and local agencies, who can strategically direct resource to address urgent workforce and economic recovery needs.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Mississippi will monitor waiver implementation through ongoing oversight and data collection using existing WIOA reporting systems. Key measures will include tracking the use of Governor's reserve funds, the number of individuals served through statewide employment and training activities, service delivery timelines, and employment and credential outcomes. Regular reviews and reporting will be used to assess effectiveness, ensure compliance with WIOA requirements, and support continuous improvement.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Use of Adult and Dislocated Worker Funds for Incumbent Worker Training

PURPOSE OF THE WAIVER

This waiver allows local areas to reserve more than 20 percent of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds for incumbent worker training. The purpose is to:

- Better respond to employer demand and evolving labor market needs,
- Increase investment in incumbent worker training supports, worker upskilling, job retention, and career advancement,
- Create flexibility that allows employers to remain competitive while strengthening layoff aversion strategies, and
- Align training investments from local workforce systems with in-demand industries while maintaining accountability and performance outcomes.

STATES WITH CURRENT WAIVERS OF THIS PROVISION

Colorado, Michigan, Missouri

STATUTORY AND/OR REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS TO BE WAIVED

WIOA Section 134(d)(4) and the associated regulations at 20 CFR 680.800(a)

These provisions define criteria for funding of incumbent worker training, including:

- Incumbent worker training must increase the competitiveness of the employer or the employee's skill level and career advancement
- Individuals receiving training must meet the definition of an incumbent worker
- Employers are required to share in the cost of training, with the required contribution based on the size of the business
- Local workforce development boards must establish policies and determine that training aligns with state and local workforce strategies
- No more than 20 percent of a local area's Adult and Dislocated Worker funds can be used for incumbent worker training

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Industry-Driven Strategies (Strategic Pillar I):** This request supports more effective engagement by workforce board members in overseeing the strategic use of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds for incumbent worker training. Current statutory and regulatory limitations on the use of these funds can constrain a board's ability to respond to employer demand and evolving workforce needs. Providing additional flexibility enables the board to focus on strategic decision-making, strengthen continuous improvement efforts, promote upward mobility, and ensure that incumbent worker training investments are aligned with state and local workforce priorities.
- **Flexibility and Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** This request provides enhanced flexibility to address training strategies that improve earnings for workers.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

Mississippi has taken steps to reduce state and local barriers that limit effective implementation of workforce programs. These actions include reviewing and updating policies to provide greater flexibility in the use of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds, issuing guidance and technical assistance to local areas on incumbent worker training, streamlining approval and reporting processes, and promoting data-driven decision-making. Mississippi has also engaged workforce partners and employers to identify barriers and support continuous improvement, ensuring that local areas can respond more effectively to employer needs while maintaining accountability under WIOA.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOAL(S) SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver supports Mississippi's strategic goals by strengthening employer engagement and ensuring the workforce system remains responsive to evolving labor market demands. By allowing greater investment in incumbent worker training, Mississippi can support upskilling, job retention, and career advancement for workers while helping employers remain competitive and avert layoffs. The waiver aligns workforce training investments with in-demand industries and high-wage career pathways, promoting economic stability and growth. At the same time, it maintains accountability and performance outcomes, ensuring that flexible funding decisions continue to drive measurable results for both workers and employers.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. **Expanded incumbent worker training** to support employer competitiveness and worker skill development
2. **Stronger job retention and layoff aversion** strategies through timely upskilling of workers

3. **Aligned training investments** with in-demand industries and occupations
4. **Increased employer engagement** and shared investment through incumbent worker training initiatives
5. **Improved employment and wage outcomes** for participating workers

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

Customers of the public workforce development system – namely employers, workers, job seekers, and students – will be positively impacted as Mississippi operates in a strategic and integrated fashion and provides oversight for an integrated service delivery system where program oversight occurs over the larger array of programs. This will also ensure a consistent approach to new work requirements for the array of workforce and social assistance programs so that participants impacted are managed comprehensively and consistently.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Mississippi will monitor waiver implementation by tracking the use of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds reserved for incumbent worker training, collecting participant outcomes such as training completion, skill gains, promotions and wage increases, and monitoring employer participation and satisfaction. Local areas will submit regular reports on fund usage and measurable outcomes, allowing the State to assess program effectiveness, compare results to benchmarks, and adjust support continuous improvement and maximize the impact of incumbent worker training programs.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

75 Percent Out-of-School Youth (OSY) Expenditure Requirements

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

This waiver will allow the State of Mississippi to renew its request to waive the 75 percent out-of-school youth (OSY) expenditure requirement set forth in Section 129(a)(4)(A) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and 20 CFR 681.410. By seeking flexibility from the mandate that at least 75 percent of specified state and local youth formula funds be used to serve OSY. Mississippi aims to better align its workforce investment activities with the current needs of both in-school and out-of-school youth populations. The waiver will enable the state and its local workforce development areas to strategically allocate resources to address regional economic demands, expand early intervention services, and strengthen overall youth workforce outcomes while continuing to prioritize services for OSY.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

Mississippi

STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR WAIVER

WIOA Section 101(b)(1) and the associated regulations at **20 CFR 679.110(b)(c)**

This waiver addresses provisions that:

1. Require that not less than 75 percent of youth formula funds be used to provide workforce investment activities for out-of-school (OSY).
2. Requires states to reserve a portion of youth funds for statewide workforce investment activities.

The State of Mississippi is seeking to renew the waiver of the requirements at WIOA Section 129(a)(4)(A) and 20 CFR 681.410, which requires not less than 75 percent of funds allotted to states under Section 127(b)(I)(C), reserved under section I 28(a), and available for statewide activities under subsection (b), and not less than 75 percent of funds available to local areas under subsection (c), shall be used to provide youth workforce investment activities for OSY.

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Industry-Driven Strategies (Strategic Pillar I):** Flexibility in the OSY expenditure requirement allows the state and local workforce development areas to align youth investments with real-time labor market demand. By allocating funds based on regional industry needs, Mississippi can expand sector-based training, work-based

learning, and career pathway programs that directly support high-growth and high-demand industries.

- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** This waiver supports increased access to career exploration, credential attainment, and work-based learning for both in-school and out-of-school youth. By investing in career readiness and skill development, the state strengthens participants' ability to transition into employment, postsecondary education, or advanced training- enhancing long-term economic mobility.
- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** Greater funding flexibility enables stronger coordination among workforce development boards, K-12 systems, postsecondary institutions, economic development entities, and community-based organizations. This promotes braided funding strategies and integrated service delivery models that reduce duplication and improve youth outcomes.
- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** This waiver provides expenditure flexibility, all performance accountability requirements under WIOA remain in effect. Mississippi will continue to track and report outcomes related to employment, credential attainment, measurable skill gains, and effectiveness in service employers, ensuring transparency and responsible stewardship of federal funds.
- **Flexibility & Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** The waiver empowers local areas to respond to unique demographic, economic, and workforce conditions. It encourages innovative programming models, such as expanded work-based learning, sector partnerships, pre-apprenticeships, and dropout preventions initiatives, while still prioritizing services for out-of-school youth.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

To remove barriers to meeting the 75 percent Out-of-School Youth (OSY) expenditure requirement under WIOA, the state revised policy to prioritize OSY enrollment, provided technical assistance and training to local workforce boards on eligibility and spending, expanded partnerships with schools and community organizations for outreach, increased investment in work-based learning and supportive services, enhanced data systems to track OSY participation and expenditures, and conducted regular monitoring to ensure compliance and improve outcomes.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOAL(S) SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver supports strategic goals that expand access to career pathways, strengthen early intervention efforts, and align youth workforce investments with regional labor market demand. By allowing greater flexibility in the use of youth funds, Mississippi can improve credential attainment, measurable skills gains, and employment outcomes for both in-school and out-of-

school youth. The waiver also promotes stronger system integration among education, workforce and industry partners while maintaining accountability for performance outcomes and encouraging local innovation to address unique regional workforce needs.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. Increase access to the MS Smart Start Career Pathway for at-risk youth in local communities based on need and without regard to educational status. The Smart Start Career pathway provides manageable steps leading to successively higher credentials and employment outcomes tailored to current life situations.
2. Build on strategic partnerships to improve services and leverage resources.
3. Higher credential attainment of industry-recognized credentials and postsecondary certificates aligned with high-demand occupations
4. Greater documented academic and technical skill progression among participating youth
5. Higher rates of placement in unsubsidized employment, apprenticeships, military service, and postsecondary education and training
6. Youth training investments more closely align with regional and economic priorities and industry workforce needs

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

This waiver primarily benefits a broad range of youth populations, including out-of-school youth seeking reentry into education or employment, in-school youth needing supplemental career preparation, and youth at risk of disconnection due to barriers such as poverty, foster care involvement, or disabilities. It also supports youth pursuing industry-aligned skills and credentials, while indirectly benefiting employers by creating a more skilled, workforce-ready talent pool. Additionally, local workforce development areas gain flexibility to design programs that address unique community needs and regional labor market demands.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Mississippi will monitor this waiver through the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) and local workforce boards by tracking youth enrollment, skill gains, credential attainment, and employment or postsecondary outcomes. Quarterly and annual reports will ensure compliance with WIOA performance measures, while financial oversight and data analysis will assess effectiveness and guide improvements in youth workforce services.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

The State posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Modifying In-School and Out-of-School Youth Expenditure Target Calculation

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

This waiver allows 75 percent expenditures target for ISY/OSY under WIOA to be calculated at the state level rather than separately for each local area. Mississippi state-level calculation will aggregate all applicable ISY/OSY expenditures and total youth expenditures across all local areas to determine a single statewide expenditure rate, ensuring compliance with federal and state reporting requirements. This provides greater flexibility for local workforce areas in allocating youth funds while ensuring that the state meets overall out-of-school investment goals.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

Indiana, Michigan

STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR WAIVER

WIOA Section 101(b)(1) and the associated regulations at 20 CFR 679.110(b)(c)

This waiver addresses provisions that:

1. Require states to establish a workforce development system that ensures resources are used to meet statutory youth program goals, including the requirement that at least 75 percent of youth funds in each local area be spent on out-of-school youth.
2. Name local workforce areas as responsible for allocating funds to meet this expenditure target while providing access to youth services and training aligned with state strategies.

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** This waiver supports youth in accessing education, training, and career pathways, helping them transition into the workforce or advance in meaningful employment.
- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** This waiver encourages coordination of youth services across areas while maintaining alignment with statewide targets, creating a more cohesive and efficient system.

- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** This waiver ensures the State still meets the overall OSY investment goal, maintaining performance oversight and fiscal responsibility.
- **Flexibility & Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** By allowing the OSY expenditure target to be calculated at the state level rather than locally, the waiver provides local areas greater discretion in allocating youth funds based on participant needs, program demand, and regional priorities.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

To remove state and local barriers, Mississippi has taken actions including:

2. Providing guidance and technical assistance to local areas on flexible youth fund allocation while maintaining compliance with overall expenditure goals
3. Reviewing local funding allocations to identify areas where rigid 75% out-of-school youth targets limit flexibility in serving youth populations
4. Developing monitoring and reporting procedures to ensure that applying the expenditure target at the state level still meets statutory requirements
5. Encouraging collaboration among local areas to strategically distribute funds and address gaps in services for out-of-school youth

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOAL(S) SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the Mississippi's strategic goals by providing greater flexibility for local workforce areas to allocate youth funds in a way that best addresses regional needs while still meeting statewide ISY/OSY investment targets. By calculating the 75 percent ISY/OSY expenditure at the state level, Mississippi can ensure more efficient and strategic use of resources, reduce administrative burdens, and better support programs that advance education, training, and career pathways for youth. This approach enhances service delivery, improves youth outcomes, and strengthens alignment with WIOA priorities and long-term workforce development objectives.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. Percent of youth funds allocated by local areas without being restricted by the 75 percent local requirement will have **increased funding flexibility**
1. A **higher enrollment** of ISY/OSY
2. **Improved percent of local areas** providing targeted programs to underserved youth populations

3. **Increased program completion rates** of youth completing training or education programs
4. Increase in **number and percent of youth obtaining employment**, internship, or apprenticeship after program participation
5. **Average increase in wages** for youth who complete training programs
6. Percent **reduction in administrative burden** related to enforcing local-level 75 percent expenditure compliance

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THIS WAIVER

This waiver primarily benefits youth participants, both OSY and ISY, by allowing local areas greater flexibility in allocating funds to meet education, training, and career pathway needs. It also benefits youth with barriers to employment, such as those at risk of dropping out or facing other challenges, by enabling more tailored and responsive program services. Additionally, local workforce development boards and system stakeholders benefit from the flexibility to distribute resources efficiently while still meeting statewide ISY/OSY investment goals.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

The State will monitor implementation by tracking statewide youth fund allocations, the number of out-of-school youth served, program completions, and employment outcomes, ensuring overall compliance.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

The State posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Modifying Training Requirements for Dislocated Workers' Needs-Related Payments

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

This waiver provides flexibility from the requirement that a dislocated worker who has ceased to qualify for unemployment compensation may receive needs-related payments only if the individual is enrolled in training services. This flexibility allows Mississippi to better support dislocated workers facing financial hardship by providing temporary income assistance while they engage in reemployment activities, career services, or other pathways that lead to suitable employment. The waiver supports timely reemployment, reduces barriers to participation in workforce services, and helps stabilize affected workers during period of transition.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

Wisconsin

STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR WAIVER

WIOA Section 134(d)(3)(B) and the associated regulations at **20 CFR 680.950(a)(2)**

This waiver addresses provisions that address the following:

1. Authorize Needs-Related (NRPs) for dislocated workers who have exhausted or ceased to qualify for unemployment compensation and requires dislocated workers to be enrolled in training services under WIOA.
2. Limits NRPs to individuals who require financial assistance to enable participation in training leading to employment.

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** By providing needs-related payments even when a dislocated worker is not enrolled in training, the waiver helps workers remain financially stable while engaging in reemployment activities, career services, or other pathways to suitable employment, supporting their timely return to the workforce.
- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** This waiver supports coordination between workforce services, career counseling, and reemployment activities to provide a holistic approach for dislocated workers.

- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** This waiver encourages effective use of resources to maximize reemployment outcomes while ensuring support is targeted to those facing hardship.
- **Flexibility & Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** This waiver offers flexibility in program rules to meet individual worker needs, removing barriers that could delay reemployment.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

Mississippi has taken actions to reduce barriers by reviewing policies governing needs-related payments to identify limitations that delay support for dislocated workers. Mississippi has provided guidance and technical assistance to local areas to streamline eligibility determination, coordinated with unemployment insurance and workforce partners to improve referrals and service alignment, and enhanced case management practices to ensure timely access to reemployment and career services. These efforts support flexibility in assisting dislocated workers while maintaining program accountability and alignment with workforce system goals.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver aligns with Mississippi's strategic goals by providing dislocated workers with greater support and flexibility during periods of economic transition. By allowing needs-related payments without strict training enrollment requirements, Mississippi can help stabilize workers facing financial hardship, reduce barriers to accessing workforce services, and promote timely reemployment. This approach strengthens economic mobility, supports workforce retention, and ensures that individuals can participate in career services and reemployment activities that lead to sustainable, in-demand employment.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. Improved outcomes for dislocated workers who receive NRPs
2. **Improved completion rates** of participant program engagements
3. **Increased financial stability** of participants so they can participate and complete programs

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

This waiver primarily benefits dislocated workers, who gain access to participant services aligned to the outcomes they are trying to achieve. Employers also benefit by transitioning workers through services that build skills and help with transitions to new employment.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

This waiver allows dislocated workers who have ceased to qualify for unemployment compensation to receive needs-related payments even if not enrolled in training services, providing critical financial support during job search. Mississippi has received eligibility requirements, issued guidance to local areas, and streamlined processes to ensure timely assistance. Projected outcomes include increased access to payments, improved financial stability, and shorter time-to-employment. Implementation will be monitored through local reporting on payments, participant demographics, and employment outcomes to ensure accountability and inform continuous improvement.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Providing In-School Youth with Individual Training Accounts

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

This waiver permits local workforce development areas to provide ISY with ITAs, consistent with the flexibility emphasized in TEGl 05-25. As outlined in TEGl 05-25, waivers may be used to remove barriers and expand access to high-quality training and credential attainment when such flexibility supports improved service delivery and better participant outcomes. Allowing ITAs for ISY enables local areas to more effectively meet the individualized education and career needs of youth by supporting enrollment in occupational skills training aligned with in-demand industries and career pathways. This waiver promotes stronger connections between secondary education, post-secondary training, and workforce systems, enhances equity and access to training opportunities, and supports WIOA's goals of credential attainment, employment, and long-term economic self-sufficiency for youth.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Northern Mariana Islands, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin

STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS WAIVER

WIOA Section 129(c)(2)(D) and the associated regulations at **20 CFR 681.550**

This waiver addresses the provision that specifically defines the circumstances under which ITAs may be used for youth, effectively limiting their availability to ISY.

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Industry-Driven Strategies (Strategic Pillar I):** By allowing ISY to access ITAs for occupational skills training, the waiver ensures youth are enrolled in programs aligned with in-demand industries and career pathways, directly linking training to employer needs.
- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** This waiver expands youth access to credentialed training and career pathways, enhancing skills, employability, and long-term workforce participation.

- **Flexibility & Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** This waiver provides local areas the discretion to tailor training opportunities to the individual education and career needs of ISY, removing barriers to high-quality training.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

To remove state and local barriers, the State has taken actions including:

1. Providing guidance and technical assistance to local areas on flexible youth fund allocation while maintaining compliance with overall expenditure goals
2. Reviewing local funding strategies that limit services to youth populations
3. Developing monitoring and reporting procedures to ensure appropriate issuance and tracking of ITAs for youth
4. Encouraging collaboration among local areas to strategically distribute funds and address gaps in services for out-of-school youth

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver supports Mississippi's strategic goals by expanding access to high-quality training and credential attainment for ISY, enabling local areas to better address individual education and career needs. By providing ITAs, the waiver strengthens connections between secondary education, post-secondary training, and workforce systems, promotes equitable access to in-demand skills, and supports long-term economic self-sufficiency, workforce readiness, and improved employment outcomes for youth.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. Increase in **ISY participation in occupational skills** aligned with in-demand industries
2. A projected increase in **recognized credential attainment among ISY** participants receiving ITAs
3. A projected increase in **ISY transitioning to postsecondary education**, advanced training, or registered apprenticeships
4. A projected **increase in employment or education placement** in the second quarter after exit for ISY participants
5. An increase in the percentage of **ISY participants enrolled in training programs** listed on the Eligible Training Provider List, supporting consistency and quality assurance across the workforce system

6. **Reduced duplication of services** and increased utilization of shared intake and case management systems across education and workforce partners

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

For the ISY-ITA waiver under WIOA, the specific beneficiaries include:

- **In-School Youth:** Provides access to a wider range of training opportunities tailored to career goals
- **Local Workforce Development Areas:** Provides greater flexibility to provide targeted training that aligns with local labor market needs
- **Employers:** better prepared youth entering the workforce with relevant skills
- **Schools and Training Providers:** increased collaboration with workforce programs and more engagement with youth participants

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

For a WIOA ISY-ITA waiver, the State would maintain measurable outcome information by tracking individual participant data and recording each ISY enrolled in ITA-funded training, including program start/completion dates, credentials earned, and placement in employment or post-secondary education.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Extending Post-Exit Supportive Services Beyond 12 Months

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

This waiver allows the State to extend the provision of supportive services beyond the current post-exit time limitation of 12 months for participants in WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs, when such services are necessary to support employment retention, wage progression, and long-term self-sufficiency.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

None

THE STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS WAIVER

WIOA Section 134(d)(2) and the associated regulations at 20 CFR 680.900 through 680.910

This waiver address provisions that address the following:

1. Participant eligibility for training services, including priority of service
2. Participant individualized assessment and service planning
3. Types of training services allowed, eligible training providers, and payment requirements

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** This waiver promotes a more cohesive workforce system by allowing continued supportive services to participants after program exit, ensuring that services are coordinated across Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs to sustain employment outcomes and career pathways.
- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** Extending supportive services beyond 12 months strengthens the focus on long-term outcomes, including employment retention, wage progression, and self-sufficiency, rather than limiting services to short-term program metrics.
- **Flexibility & Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** By removing the 12-month post-exit limit, the State gains flexibility to tailor supportive services based on individual participant needs, supporting innovative strategies to address barriers such as transportation, childcare, or training needs that arise after exit.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

To support the waiver extending post-exit supportive services beyond 12 months, the State has taken several actions to remove barriers for participants. These include providing continued assistance with transportation, childcare, and other work-related expenses, offering individualized follow-up and case management to identify emerging needs, and connecting participants to community resources such as counseling, health services, and additional training opportunities. Mississippi also works with employers to address workplace challenges, ensures access to technology and digital tools, and leverages flexible program policies to eliminate administrative or financial barriers, all aimed at promoting sustained employment, wage progression, and long-term self-sufficiency.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

The waiver extending post-exit supportive services beyond 12 months supports Mississippi's strategic goals by helping participants maintain employment, advance in their careers, and achieve long-term self-sufficiency. It ensures services remain responsive to individual needs, strengthens coordination across Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs, and maximizes the impact of workforce investments by reducing barriers that could lead to job loss or repeated program re-entry.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. Improved employment retention: participants are more likely to maintain stable employment over the long term due to continued support for transportation, childcare, and other work-related needs.
2. Wage Progression and Career Advancement: Ongoing services support skill development, training, and career pathway opportunities, helping participants increase earnings and move into higher-level positions
3. Increased self-sufficiency: Extended support reduces financial and personal barriers, promoting long-term economic independence, and reducing reliance on public assistance.
4. Enhanced Participant Satisfaction and Engagement: Continued access to supportive services improves the overall experience for participants, making them more likely to successfully navigate workforce challenges.
5. Reduced Program Re-Entry and Administrative Burden: By addressing barriers post-exit, participants are less likely to need re-enrollment, allowing the system to focus resources on outcomes rather than repeated intake and case management.

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

The populations served by the waiver extending post-exit supportive services beyond 12 months include participants of **WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs** who have exited the program but continue to need support to maintain employment, advance in their careers, or achieve long-term self-sufficiency. This may include individuals facing barriers such as low income, limited work experience, transportation or childcare challenges, disability, or other personal or economic obstacles that could impact employment retention and wage progression. The waiver ensures that participants who require additional assistance to succeed post-exit can continue receiving supportive services tailored to their needs.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Mississippi will monitor waiver implementation through centralized fiscal oversight, case file reviews, and performance monitoring. The State will establish clear policies defining eligible post-exit supportive services, duration limits, documentation requirements, and approval thresholds.

Mississippi will evaluate the impact of extended post-exit supportive services on employment retention, earnings, and program outcomes and will report findings through the WIOA Annual Report and other required reporting mechanisms.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Modifying State Performance Measures Requirements to Allow the State to Meet 85% or Better of the Negotiated Performance Goals Without Sanction

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

This waiver allows Mississippi to meet 85% of each negotiated performance goal without the consequences imposed by the current 90% requirement. This flexibility enables the State to adjust performance expectations to better reflect local labor market conditions, workforce priorities, and the impact of extraordinary circumstances on program outcomes.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

None

THE STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS WAIVER

WIOA Section 116(f); 20 CFR § 677.190(d); 34 CFR §§ 361.190(d) and 463.190(d)

This waiver address provisions that address the following:

1. a performance failure occurs if:
 - Any single Individual Indicator Score for any single core program falls below 50 percent of the adjusted level of performance;
 - The Overall State Program Score falls below 90 percent for that single core program; or
 - The Overall State Indicator Score falls below 90 percent for that single measure.
2. Requires that local performance measures be negotiated with the Governor and adjusted as necessary based on state guidelines
3. Ensures that local workforce development boards are accountable for achieving agreed-upon performance outcomes and that performance is monitored and reported regularly

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** This waiver indirectly supports workers by ensuring performance metrics prioritize outcomes that enhance access to training, employment, and career advancement opportunities.

- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** This waiver supports alignment of local performance measures with statewide workforce priorities and strategies, promoting a more cohesive workforce system.
- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** By allowing the State to adjust performance measures, the waiver ensures that local board performance expectations are realistic, meaningful, and outcome-focused, reflecting local labor market conditions and workforce priorities.
- **Flexibility & Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** This waiver provides the State discretion to adapt performance metrics in response to extraordinary circumstances, workforce needs, or unique conditions.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

Mississippi has reviewed current performance measures, developed alternative metrics aligned with local labor market needs, and provided guidance and technical assistance to local boards on negotiating modified performance goals. Reporting and monitoring processes have been streamlined to reduce administrative burden while maintaining accountability, and stakeholders have been engaged to ensure transparency and meaningful performance expectations.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver aligns with Mississippi's strategic goals by allowing performance measures to be tailored to local labor market conditions and workforce priorities, ensuring that local workforce development boards are held accountable for outcomes that are meaningful and achievable in their specific contexts. By providing this flexibility, Mississippi can promote more effective service delivery, responsive workforce strategies, and improved alignment between board performance, economic needs, and participant outcomes.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. **Performance** measures that apply equitably across programs
2. **Allow for flexibility** within Mississippi and each workforce area to address a currently burgeoning economy with needed adaptability

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

This waiver benefits job seekers and program participants, who gain from workforce services better aligned with local labor market conditions and needs. It also benefits local workforce development boards and system stakeholders, who receive flexibility to set realistic performance expectations and respond to extraordinary circumstances, ultimately supporting more effective service delivery.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Mississippi will monitor waiver implementation by tracking local board performance against modified measures, including employment outcomes, median earnings, credential attainment, and skill gains. Local boards will submit regular reports on participant results and employer engagement. Mississippi will analyze data to ensure accountability, evaluate the effectiveness of the modified performance measures, and adjust support continuous improvement and better workforce outcomes.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Increasing On-the-Job Training Employer Reimbursement

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

This waiver permits local workforce development areas to increase the On-the-Job Training (OJT) employer reimbursement rate to up to 90 percent of wage costs for businesses with 50 or fewer employees. This waiver is intended to reduce barriers to participation for small businesses, expand access to work-based learning opportunities for participants, and strengthen employer engagement in the workforce development system. By providing enhanced reimbursement, the waiver supports small employers' capacity to hire, train, and retain workers while improving participant skill development, employment outcomes, and alignment with in-demand industries and career pathways, consistent with WIOA's goals of economic opportunity, system integration, and performance accountability.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, Nevada, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Wisconsin

THE STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS WAIVER

WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(H)(i) and the associated regulations at 20 CFR 680.720(b)

This waiver seeks flexibility regarding the provision that specifically limits OJT employer reimbursement to 50 percent of the wage rate paid to participants, with authority for local areas to increase reimbursement up to 75 percent for certain employers, such as small businesses or employers who demonstrate the need for additional assistance.

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Industry-Driven Strategy (Strategic Pillar I):** This waiver strengthens employer engagement by incentivizing small businesses to participate in OJT programs, ensuring training and workforce development are directly aligned with employer needs and in-demand industries.
- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** This waiver expands OJT opportunities to help participants gain real world experience, build skills, and advance into unsubsidized employment, supporting career progression.

- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** This waiver encourages collaboration between employers, training providers, and workforce programs, aligning system resources to support effective work-based learning.
- **Flexibility & Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** By allowing higher reimbursement rates for small businesses, the waiver provides local areas with flexibility to design programs that reduce barriers to participation and meet local market needs.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

Mississippi has taken steps to reduce state and local barriers to employer participation by providing clear policy guidance, streamlining procedures, and offering technical assistance to local workforce development areas. These actions support consistent implementation, improved coordination among partners, and increased access to work-based learning opportunities statewide.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the Mississippi's strategic goals by strengthening employer engagement and expanding work-based learning opportunities that directly connect participants to in-demand industries and career pathways. By increasing OJT employer reimbursement rates, the State reduces barriers for small businesses to hire, train, and retain workers, supporting local economic growth and job creation. The waiver also enhances participant skill development, promotes career advancement, and ensures workforce investments are aligned with labor market needs. Overall, it advances the State's goals of economic opportunity, system integration, and performance accountability while fostering a responsive, employer-driven workforce system.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. **Increase in number of businesses** with 50 or fewer employees participating in OJT
2. **Increase in number of participants enrolled** in OJT opportunities statewide
3. **Increase in employment or retention** with the training employer following OJT completion
4. **Increase in average wages or advancement** within six months of OJT completion
5. **Increase in repeat participation by small businesses** in workforce training programs
6. **Reduced time to execute OJT agreements** and increased utilization of standardized employer engagement processes

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

The following groups are expected to benefit from implementation of this waiver:

- Jobseekers and program participants: expanded access to paid, work-based learning opportunities that lead to unsubsidized employment, skill development, and improved earnings potential.
- Small businesses (50 or fewer employees): reduced financial burden associated with training new employees, increased capacity to hire and train workers, and stronger engagement with the workforce development system.
- Local workforce development areas: greater flexibility to respond to local labor market needs and strengthen employer partnerships through expanded use of OJT.
- The statewide workforce system: improved alignment between training investments and employer demand, increased utilization of work-based learning strategies, and stronger employment outcomes across WIOA core programs.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Mississippi will monitor implementation of the waiver through existing oversight and accountability mechanisms. This includes local policies and OJT agreements to ensure compliance with waiver conditions, tracking performance and expenditure data through the statewide workforce data system, and analyzing outcomes related to employer participation and participant employment. The State will also provide ongoing technical assistance and conduct periodic programmatic and fiscal reviews to ensure consistent implementation, fiscal integrity, and continuous improvement across local workforce development areas.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Youth Program Elements

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

This waiver will allow Mississippi to better align youth services with local labor market needs, reduce administrative burden, and focus resources on strategies that produce the strongest education and employment outcomes. This waiver will support innovation in program design, enable more efficient service integration, and address unique regional challenges, such as serving rural communities or high-need populations. Importantly, the waiver does not eliminate the requirement to serve youth but rather allows modifications in implementation to improve effectiveness and responsiveness while maintaining accountability under federal guidelines.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

None

THE STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS WAIVER

WIOA Section 129(c)(2) and the associated regulations at **20 CFR 681.460**

This waiver addresses the provision that specifically requires the 14 youth program elements be available at the local workforce development boards.

1. This section states that local workforce development boards shall make available the 14 program elements to eligible youth participants. The law lists each required element, including (but not limited to) tutoring, work experience, occupational skills training, leadership development, supportive services, mentoring, follow-up services

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Industry-Driven Strategies (Strategic Pillar I):** This waiver allows states and local workforce boards to prioritize youth services that are directly connected to high-demand industries and regional labor market needs. Rather than expending resources to maintain access to all 14 elements in equal measure, local areas can focus on work-based learning, occupational skills training, and sector partnerships that align with employer demand. This strengthens employer engagement and ensures youth programming supports in-demand career pathways.
- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** By emphasizing credential attainment, career pathways, and work experience tied to growth industries, the waiver supports upward mobility for youth participants. Resources can be concentrated on services that lead to

recognized postsecondary credentials, employment in high-growth sectors, and long-term wage progression, rather than maintaining lower-impact activities solely for compliance purposes.

- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** By emphasizing credential attainment career pathways, and work experience tied to growth industries the waiver supports upward mobility for youth participants. Resources can be concentrated on services that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials, employment in high-growth sectors, and long-term wage progression, rather than maintaining lower-impact activities solely for compliance purposes.
- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** Even with the waiver, performance accountability measures under WIOA remain in effect. States must still meet negotiated performance targets related to employment, education, credential attainment, measurable skill gains, and effectiveness in service employers. The waiver supports accountability by allowing states to direct funds toward strategies most likely to improve measurable outcomes while maintaining federal reporting and oversight requirements.
- **Flexibility & Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** This waiver directly advances the pillar by providing local areas with the flexibility to design innovative youth service models tailored to regional conditions. It enables pilot programs, streamlined service approaches, and sector-based strategies that may not fit neatly within the structure of the 14 prescribed elements, while still advancing the overall goals of WIOA.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

The State has taken steps to align performance management across local areas by issuing statewide guidance, standardizing data definitions, and centralizing performance reporting and technical assistance. The State has worked to encourage consistent interpretation of performance measures and to support local areas in continuous improvement efforts.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver aligns with state strategic goals by allowing more flexibility in youth program delivery, enabling resources to be focused on high-demand industries, credential attainment, and employment outcomes. It supports equity by targeting services to youth barriers, encourages coordination across workforce and education systems, and fosters innovative approaches while maintaining accountability for results. This ensures programs are both efficient and responsive to the state's workforce and economic priorities.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. **Increased youth engagement and participation:** more youth, especially those with barriers access programs tailored to their needs rather than generic services
2. **Higher credential attainment and skill development:** resources can be concentrated on occupational training work-based learning and credential programs that lead to employment
3. **Improved employment outcomes:** greater placement in high-demand industries, internships, apprenticeships, or postsecondary pathways
4. **Enhanced system efficiency:** reduced duplication of services and better coordination among workforce, education, and community partners
5. **Greater innovative in program design:** local areas can pilot new approaches, integrate services creatively, and test strategies that may not fit within all 14 elements
6. **Improved accountability and measurable results:** by focusing on high-impact services, performance metrics such as measurable skill gains, employment retention, and postsecondary enrollment are expected to improve

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

This waiver primarily benefits youth facing barriers to education and employment, especially those who may struggle to access all 14 program elements under the standard WIOA requirements. This includes:

- Out-of-school youth who have dropped out or are disconnected from school
- In-school youth with high-risk factors, such as low income, foster care involvement, or justice system involvement
- Youth with disabilities or special needs who require tailored supports
- Youth in underserved or rural communities with limited access to training or work experience opportunities
- Low-income or marginalized youth who face financial, transportation, or other structural barriers

By allowing flexibility in which program elements are delivered and how resources are allocated, the waiver ensures that services are targeted to the youth most in need, improving their access to training, work experience, mentoring, and supportive services that directly impact education and employment outcomes.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

This waiver will be monitored through existing federal and state oversight under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, including tracking required performance indicators such as employment, credential attainment, measurable skill gains, and employer effectiveness. The state

will conduct regular programmatic and fiscal monitoring, including data validation and case reviews, to ensure funds are appropriately and youth continue to receive necessary services. Outcomes and participation trends will be analyzed to assess impact, with continued reporting to the U.S. Department of Labor to ensure accountability and transparency.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

Mississippi posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.

Income Eligibility for In-School Youth (ISY)

PURPOSE OF THIS WAIVER

The waiver is to allow in-school youth (ISY) who are enrolled in high-quality pre-apprenticeship programs, meeting the standards established under WIOA and delivered through partnerships with local educational agencies and employers, to participate in WIOA youth services without being subject to the low-income eligibility requirement. This flexibility enables the state to expand access to structured, industry-recognized career pathways that prepare students for Registered Apprenticeships and high-demand occupations. By removing the income restriction for these approved pre-apprenticeship programs, the state can strengthen employer engagement, promote early career exposure, and build a more robust talent pipeline while still prioritizing youth who face barriers to employment.

STATES WITH EXISTING WAIVERS

None

THE STATUTORY AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS WAIVER

WIOA Section 129(a)(1)(B) and Section 129(c)(1) and the associated regulations at 20 CFR 681.230(b) and 20 CFR 681.210(a)(1)

The low-income eligibility requirement for in-school youth (ISY) is established under WIOA and its implementing regulations.

- These sections specific that in-school youth must be low-income and meet one or more additional barriers to employment (such as basic skills deficiency, English language learner status, or homelessness) to qualify for WIOA youth program services
- Low-income criterion generally refers to household income at or below the federal poverty line or receipt of public assistance

Under these provisions, the low-income requirement is a key eligibility determinant for ISY participation in WIOA youth programs, ensuring that services target youth with economic disadvantage. The waiver allows the state to temporarily lift this requirement for ISY enrolled in approved pre-apprenticeship programs while still meeting other statutory and program quality standards.

RATIONALE FOR THE WAIVER

The rationale for this waiver is to expand access to high-quality pre-apprenticeship programs for in-school youth (ISY) who meet WIOA program quality criteria, regardless of household

income. Limiting participation to low-income youth can prevent motivated students from accessing structured career pathways that lead to Registered Apprenticeships and high-demand occupations. By removing the low-income requirement for these programs, the state can strengthen employer partnerships, build a skilled workforce pipeline, and provide youth with early exposure to industry-aligned training and career opportunities, while still prioritizing program quality and outcomes.

This waiver aligns with the following strategic pillars:

- **Industry-Driven Strategies (Strategic Pillar I):** The waiver supports employer engagement by connecting youth directly to pre-apprenticeships aligned with industry needs, ensuring training leads to high-demand occupations.
- **Worker Mobility (Strategic Pillar II):** By giving more youth access to pre-apprenticeship, the waiver helps participants gain credentials and work experience that facilitate career advancement and long-term employment mobility.
- **Integrated Systems (Strategic Pillar III):** The waiver promotes collaboration among schools, workforce boards, and employers, creating coordinated pathways that combine education and work-based learning.
- **Accountability (Strategic Pillar IV):** Even with the income requirement lifted, performance measures, such as credential attainment, postsecondary enrollment, and employment outcomes, continue to be tracked to ensure program effectiveness.
- **Flexibility & Innovation (Strategic Pillar V):** The waiver allows the state to innovate in program design, expand pre-apprenticeship opportunities, and adapt eligibility rules to maximize access without compromising quality standards.

This waiver aligns with Mississippi and federal workforce priorities by broadening access to structured, industry-aligned training for youth while maintaining accountability and promoting strong workforce outcomes.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS

To remove barriers to implementation, Mississippi strengthened policy guidance to prioritize out-of-school youth, ensured compliance with the 75 percent OSY expenditure requirement and the 20 percent work experience expenditure requirement, expanded employer partnerships to increase paid and unpaid work-based learning opportunities, provided technical assistance to local areas on eligibility and documentation, improved data tracking and monitoring systems, and aligned youth services with career pathways and in-demand industries to improve access, participation, and performance outcomes.

STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS SUPPORTED BY THIS WAIVER

This waiver aligns with the state's strategic workforce goals by increasing flexibility to serve priority populations more effectively while advancing sector-based strategies, career pathways, and employer engagement initiatives. By reducing administrative constraints and allowing funds to be aligned with regional labor market demand, the waiver supports expanded access to training and work-based learning, improved credential attainment, stronger partnerships with industry, and better employment and wage outcomes. At the same time, Mississippi maintains a focus on serving individuals with barriers to employment, ensuring Mississippi advances both equity and economic competitiveness under the WIOA framework.

PROJECTED PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

This waiver will achieve the following outcomes:

1. Increased access to training and work-based learning opportunities
2. Improved credential attainment rates
3. Higher employment and wage outcomes
4. Stronger alignment with in-demand industries
5. Expanded employer partnerships
6. Enhanced service to individuals with barriers to employment under WIOA

POPULATIONS BENEFITING FROM THE WAIVER

This waiver benefits in-school youth who are interested in pre-apprenticeship programs but do not meet the low-income eligibility requirement. It provides access to motivated students, including those at risk of disengagement, youth in underserved or rural areas, and those exploring careers in high-demand trades or technical fields. By removing the income restriction for approved programs, the waiver expands opportunities for early career exposure, hands-on training, and industry connections that support long-term employment and credential attainment.

MONITORING AND MEASURING SUCCESS

This waiver will be monitored through existing state and federal oversight under WIOA. The state will track performance indicators such as credential attainment, postsecondary enrollment, measurable skill gains, and employment outcomes for participating youth. Programmatic and fiscal reviews of local educational agencies and pre-apprenticeship providers will ensure that programs meet WIOA quality criteria and that funds are used appropriately. Data on participants, outcomes, and program quality will be analyzed regularly, and any issues will be addressed through technical assistance or corrective actions to maintain and program integrity.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION

The State posted this waiver request for public comment during the WIOA State Plan mid-cycle update and notified affected local workforce development boards.