

**U.S. Department of Labor**

Employment and Training Administration  
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20210



July 27, 2026

The Honorable Tate Reeves  
Governor of Mississippi  
P.O. Box 139  
Jackson, MS 39205

Dear Governor Reeves:

Thank you for your waiver request submission to the U.S. Department of Labor (Department) regarding certain statutory and regulatory provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the accompanying plan to improve the statewide workforce development system (enclosed). The waiver requests were received on April 30, 2026, as part of your recent WIOA State Plan modification submission. This letter provides the Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) official response to your request and memorializes that Mississippi will meet the outcomes and implement the measures identified in its plan to ensure accountability agreed to by Mississippi and ETA. This action is taken under the Secretary of Labor's authority to waive certain requirements of WIOA Title I, Subtitles A, B, and E, and Sections 8–10 of the Wagner-Peyser Act in WIOA Section 189(i).

Requested Waiver: Waiver of the state workforce development board (SWDB) membership requirements at WIOA Section 101(b)(1) and (c) and the corresponding regulations at 20 CFR 679.110(b)-(c), and the local workforce development board (LWDB) membership requirements at WIOA Section 107(b)(2)(B) and the corresponding regulations at 20 CFR 679.320(c).

ETA Response: ETA approves, through June 30, 2028, the State's request to reduce the WIOA state and local board membership workforce requirements and to permit board members to satisfy multiple categories. The State affirms that this waiver will streamline board size, increase coordination between employers and state and local government, and improve board accountability. ETA reviewed the State's waiver request and plan and has determined that the requirements requested to be waived impede the ability of the State to implement its plan to improve the workforce development system. Before implementing this waiver, the State must describe to ETA which of the entities will represent multiple membership categories in response to the State's request to permit this arrangement. Please note that multiple-entity representation is permitted for local workforce boards, and this arrangement does not require a waiver.

Requested Waiver: Waiver of the requirement at WIOA Section 121(e)(1) and 20 CFR 678.300(c) to establish and maintain a comprehensive American Job Center (AJC) in each of the State's local workforce development areas.

ETA Response: ETA approves, through June 30, 2028, the State's request to waive the requirement that each local area maintain a comprehensive AJC. Under this waiver, Mississippi must ensure that job seekers and employer customers in local areas that implement this waiver can access the programs, services, and activities provided by all required one-stop partners.

Requested Waiver: Waiver of the requirements at WIOA Sections 128 and 133 and the associated regulations at 20 CFR 681 and 683 to allow consolidation of WIOA Title I funding as a block grant.

ETA Response: This request falls outside of the Secretary's waiver authority and, therefore, cannot be approved. WIOA 189(i)(3)(A)(i) prohibits the Secretary from waiving requirements that would be affected by this waiver, including the allocation of funds to local areas, the funding of infrastructure costs for One-Stop Centers, and other requirements related to the basic purposes of WIOA Title I.

Requested Waiver: Waiver of the requirements at 20 CFR 678.305–678.320 and 20 CFR 678.500–678.760 to allow the redefinition of the AJC service delivery structure and implement a statewide memorandum of understanding (MOU)/infrastructure funding agreement (IFA) model.

ETA Response: This request falls outside of the Secretary's waiver authority and, therefore, cannot be approved. WIOA 189(i)(3)(A)(i) prohibits the Secretary from waiving requirements related to the funding of infrastructure costs for one-stop centers, which would include requirements related to the infrastructure funding agreements that govern the sharing of infrastructure costs. However, the ETA is currently reviewing the State's WorkFlex plan and notes that certain exclusions to the Secretary's general waiver authority are not prohibited under WorkFlex.

Requested Waiver: Waiver of the requirements of WIOA Sections 133(a)(2) and 134(a)(2)(A) to allow flexibility to use up to 50 percent of funds reserved by the Governor to provide statewide rapid response activities under WIOA Section 134(a)(2)(A) to also provide statewide employment and training activities in the first year of funding availability.

ETA Response: ETA approves, for PYs 2026 and 2027, the State's request to waive the spending requirements of WIOA Sections 133(a)(2) and Section 134(a)(2)(A) to enable the State to use up to 50 percent of funds reserved by the Governor to provide statewide rapid response activities under WIOA Section 134(a)(2)(A) to also provide statewide employment and training activities in the first year of funding availability.

Requested Waiver: Waiver to allow flexibility in the use of funds reserved by the Governor to provide statewide rapid response activities under WIOA Section 134(a)(2)(A) to also provide statewide employment and training activities under WIOA Section 134(a)(2)(B) and WIOA Section 134(a)(3), including disaster-relief employment to affected areas.

ETA Response: ETA approves, through June 30, 2028, the State's request to waive the spending requirements of WIOA secs. 134(a)(1)(A) and 134(a)(1)(B)(i) to enable it to use statewide funds for disaster-relief employment, as described in WIOA Section 170(d) and 20 CFR 687.100(b).

Requested Waiver: Waiver associated with the requirement at WIOA Section 129(a)(4)(A) and 20 CFR 681.410 that the State and local areas expend 75 percent of Governor's reserve youth funds and local formula youth funds on out-of-school youth (OSY).

ETA Response: ETA approves, for PYs 2026 and 2027, which includes the entire time period for which states are authorized to spend each of those PY fund allotments, the State's request to waive the requirement that the State expend 75 percent of Governor's reserve youth funds on OSY. ETA reviewed the State's waiver request and plan and has determined that the requirements requested to be waived impede the ability of Mississippi to implement its plan to improve the workforce development system. The State may lower the expenditure requirement of Governor's reserve funds to 50 percent for OSY.

In addition, ETA approves, for PYs 2026 and 2027, which includes the entire time period for which states are authorized to spend each of those PY fund allotments, the State's request to waive the requirement that local areas expend 75 percent of local youth formula funds on OSY. The State may lower the local youth funds expenditure requirement to 50 percent for OSY.

Requested Waiver: Waiver of 20 CFR 681.550 to allow WIOA individual training accounts (ITAs) for in-school youth (ISY).

ETA Response: ETA approves, for PYs 2026 and 2027, which includes the entire time period for which states are authorized to spend each of those PY fund allotments, the State's request to waive the requirement limiting ITAs to only out-of-school youth (OSY), ages 16–24. In addition to these OSY, the State may use ITAs for ISY, ages 16–21.

Requested Waiver: Waiver of the requirements at WIOA Section 116(f) and the associated regulations at 20 CFR 677.190(d), 34 CFR 361.190(d), and 34 CFR 463.190(d) that establish the sanctions for state failure to meet state performance accountability measures.

ETA Response: ETA does not approve the State's request. As communicated in Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 05-25: *Maximizing Opportunity in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Programs*, ETA supports waiver requests that advance the administration's key priorities, and will not support waiver requests related to performance outcomes and accountability.

Requested Waiver: Waiver of the requirement that local youth programs make available each of the 14 youth programs elements required under WIOA Section 129(c)(2).

ETA Response: ETA approves, for PYs 2026 and 2027, the State's request to waive the requirement that local youth programs directly provide each of the 14 youth program elements listed in WIOA Section 129(c)(2) and 20 CFR 681.460. Under this approval, local areas are not required to make available all 14 program elements for the purpose of meeting and making improvements toward statewide employment, median earnings, credential attainment, and measurable skill gains goals for WIOA Youth program participants. ETA reviewed the State's request and plan and determined that requiring local programs to make available each element impedes the State's ability to implement its plan to improve youth workforce development service delivery.

Requested Waiver: Waiver associated with the requirement at WIOA Section 129(a)(1)(C)(iii) which establishes the low-income eligibility requirement for WIOA Youth ISY participants.

ETA Response: This request falls outside of the Secretary's waiver authority and, therefore, cannot be approved. WIOA 189(i)(3)(A)(i) prohibits the Secretary from waiving requirements related to participant eligibility.

The State withdrew the following requests on June 26, 2026:

- Waiver for WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(F)(i) and (G) and 20 CFR 680.320(a) to allow for all training services to be provided through training contracts.
- Waiver of WIOA 134(d)(4) and 20 CFR 680.800(a) to allow local areas to reserve more than 20 percent of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds for incumbent worker training (IWT).
- Waiver of WIOA Section 134(d)(3)(B) and 20 CFR 680.950(a)(2) that requires a dislocated worker who has ceased to qualify for unemployment compensation to be eligible to receive needs-related payments only if such worker is enrolled in training services.
- Waiver of WIOA Section 134(d)(2) and 20 CFR 680.910 to allow the use of supportive services for participants beyond 12 months post-exit for employment retention.
- Waiver of WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(H)(i) and 20 CFR 680.720(b) in order to increase on-the-job training (OJT) employer reimbursement up to 90 percent for businesses with 50 or fewer employees.

The State is reminded that WIOA Title I waivers may not be used for any discriminatory purposes. All activities and waiver plan provisions must comply with Section 188 of WIOA, the implementing regulations at 29 CFR Part 38, and all applicable federal nondiscrimination laws.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marek Laco', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marek Laco  
Acting Assistant Secretary

Enclosures

cc: Laura Ring, Chief Operations Officer, Mississippi Department of Employment Security  
Robert DeYoung, Director, Office of Grant Management, Mississippi Department of  
Employment Security  
Renata Adjibodou, Atlanta Regional Administrator, ETA  
Jeffrey Patton, Federal Project Officer, ETA

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## 2026 Mississippi Waiver Requests (4/30/2026)

### Waiver 1 - 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:
  1. One member nominated by State labor federations
  2. 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 oversi

ght 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.

## **Waiver 2 - 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 promotes 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 circumstances
  - 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 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 allow ability 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.

## **Waiver 3 - 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.

## **Waiver 4 - 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:
  1. Funding allotments and allocations
  2. State reservations
  3. Local youth services
  4. 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.

## **Waiver 5 - 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 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.

## **Waiver 6 - 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.

## **Waiver 7 - 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 ens

ures 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 of 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.

## **Waiver 8 - 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.

## **Waiver 9 - 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, post-secondary 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 prevention 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 upon 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 post-secondary 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.

## **Waiver 10 - 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 while 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**
2. A **higher enrollment** of ISY/OSY
3. **Improved percent of local areas** providing targeted programs to underserved youth populations
4. **Increased program completion rates** of youth completing training or education programs
5. Increase in **number and percent of youth obtaining employment**, internship, or apprenticeship after program participation
6. **Average increase in wages** for youth who complete training programs
7. 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, l

ocal 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.

## **Waiver 11 - 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 wo

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.

### **Waiver 12 - 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.

## **Waiver 13 - 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.

## **Waiver 14 - 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.

## **Waiver 15 - 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.

## **Waiver 16 - 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, streamline

d 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.

## **Waiver 17 - 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 C FR 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 specify 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 system

s, 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.

## 2026 Mississippi Waiver: Submission of Additional Information (6/26/2026)

### Mississippi 2026 State Waiver Updates for DOL

#### Waiver #1. State **and Local** Workforce Development Board Membership

The intent of this request was that it be requested on behalf of both the SWIB and the four LWIBs. We are asking that the Department of Labor allow us to expand the scope of this request to encompass our original intention.

What membership categories would this impact?

- Mississippi's State Workforce Investment Board and the four Local Workforce Development Boards are increasingly responsible for aligning talent development with statewide economic competitiveness goals. The State's challenge is not simply administering workforce programs; it is producing sufficient talent to meet projected demand in priority occupations and supporting industry growth. Greater flexibility in board composition allows Mississippi and local areas to recruit members with expertise in talent production, workforce innovation, education alignment, and industry growth rather than maintaining membership structures designed for a workforce system that operated largely in program silos.
- Mississippi seeks flexibility related to the worker representation requirements under WIOA Section 101(b) and Section 107(b)(2)(B), specifically the requirement that at least 20 percent of board membership (state and local) represent labor organizations and workforce representatives and the requirement that individual members may not represent multiple categories. Mississippi would continue to include worker perspectives, registered apprenticeship representation, and workforce program expertise; however, the State seeks flexibility to appoint members whose experience spans multiple workforce functions and to fill positions based on current labor market realities rather than prescriptive categorical requirements.

Estimate the impact on board size, any specific efficiencies to be realized, and provide an expanded discussion on why the statutory requirements are burdensome.

Mississippi does not intend to eliminate stakeholder representation but expects the waiver would allow the State and the local areas to reduce duplicative membership requirements and maintain board structures approximately 10-20 percent smaller than would otherwise be required under current statutory formulas.

Flexibility would:

- Reduce board vacancies.
- Improve attendance and engagement.

- Accelerate appointment timelines.
- Reduce administrative burden associated with recruiting category-specific members.
- Increase the percentage of members actively participating in committees and strategic initiatives.

The State anticipates improved board member retention and tenure, reduced appointment delays, and increased participation in strategic planning and performance oversight activities

Explain how the board membership shift would provide local labor market flexibility.

Greater flexibility in board composition allows Mississippi and the local workforce areas to appoint members who reflect current and emerging industry demand rather than filling seats based solely on federally prescribed categories. This enables the boards to recruit leaders from high-growth sectors such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, construction, logistics, information infrastructure, energy, and technology as labor market conditions evolve.

The waiver would strengthen the boards' abilities to:

- Align workforce investments with real-time employer demand.
- Respond more rapidly to emerging workforce shortages.
- Coordinate workforce, education, and economic development strategies.
- Support regional talent development priorities.
- Focus governance discussions on measurable talent and employment outcomes rather than program administration.

This flexibility is particularly important as Mississippi implements initiatives such as Workforce Pell, the State Apprenticeship Agency, Talent Solutions Centers, and the Front Door workforce strategy, all of which require governance structures that can adapt quickly to changing labor market conditions.

### **Waiver #2. Training Services to be Provided through Contracts (Robin's feedback needed, then Robert Bock's)**

After reviewing current resources and strategic priorities, Mississippi has decided not to move forward with Waiver #2. Decreased funding levels and a refocused emphasis on other high-impact initiatives have led the State to reassess the necessity of this waiver. Accordingly, Waiver #2 will no longer be included in our request to USDOL.

### **Waiver #3. Maintaining a Comprehensive One-Stop Center**

Provide a more detailed discussion of the proposed model.

The proposed service delivery model maintains full access to all one-stop partner programs while reducing the administrative burden associated with operating a full-time physical comprehensive center in every local area. All required partners will continue to provide access to their services through the WIN Job Center network, even if they do not maintain a full-time physical presence. Access will be ensured through a combination of scheduled onsite partner days, virtual service delivery, and coordinated referral workflows.

Rather than investing significant resources into underutilized facilities, Mississippi intends to redirect WIOA funding toward direct training, work-based learning, and participant support services. The local area built strong relationships with training providers, enabling high-quality training access without reliance on large brick-and-mortar footprints.

The revised model preserves all WIOA service requirements by offering customers multiple ways to engage with core programs:

- WIN Job Centers remain the primary access point, with onsite staff available for career, training, and supportive services
- Partner programs offer virtual appointments, scheduled onsite days, and co-location as needed
- The MDES Navigator system provides direct virtual access to MDES specialists and ensures customers receive timely support regardless of location

This approach allows the local area to maintain required accessibility, safeguard program quality, and meet customers where they are—while significantly reducing infrastructure and lease costs.

Identify which local areas will take advantage of this waiver and which comprehensive one-stops will close.

South Central Mississippi Works

Jackson WIN Job Center would remain open but as an affiliate WIN Job Center

Explain whether the intent is to eliminate all comprehensive centers and expectations for monitoring.

Intent is **not** to eliminate all comprehensive centers statewide.

Routine monitoring will continue (programmatic, ADA, language access, technology reliability, and customer satisfaction) across all access modalities. The local area believes this model is a sustainable, modernized, and equitable method of providing comprehensive one-stop services, ensuring that every participant continues to receive the full range of

WIOA-mandated offerings without requiring every partner to maintain a full-time physical presence.

**Waiver #6. Flexible Use of Governor-Reserved Funds for Employment and Training Activities (MDES)**

On average, at the end of the first year of availability, what is the state's Rapid Response balance?

On average, we have approximately \$3M in Rapid Response allocation, which is trending down each year. Our trend is to spend about \$250,000 of RR funds in the first year, which is less than 10% of the allocation, leaving 90% or more of the allocation carrying into year 2.

Does the state typically convert those unused Rapid Response funds to the Governor's Reserve?

No, not typically.

Provide specifics on how Mississippi would like to use these funds, including quantified targets and projected outcomes.

Mississippi intends to use the Governor-reserved funds to directly support activities that strengthen employment, training access, and workforce participation across the state. Specifically, the State will use these funds to:

- **Expand job fairs and hiring events in local areas**, increasing the number and geographic reach of employer engagement activities and improving connections between jobseekers and available job opportunities.
- **Provide customized training for Mississippi employers**, particularly in high-demand sectors, enabling companies to upskill new hires and existing workers to meet immediate workforce needs.
- **Support reentry programming**, including job readiness services, skills training, and transition-to-employment supports for justice-involved individuals returning to the labor force.

Projected outcomes for these investments will align with Mississippi's current WIOA performance indicators, including improved employment rates, median earnings, measurable skill gains, and credential attainment results. These uses ensure that Governor-reserved funds are deployed to activities that directly support worker mobility, employer demand, and statewide economic growth.

**Waiver #7. Flexible Use of Governor-Reserved Funds for Statewide Employment and Training Activities, including Disaster Relief Employment (MDES)**

Clarify the intent of this waiver request.

Primary purpose is to ensure Mississippi can deploy WIOA Governor-reserved funds rapidly for statewide employment and training, including disaster relief employment when emergencies impact regions of the state, while preserving priority of service and accountability.

Clarify the statutory provisions that this waiver is expected to impact.

To clarify the statutory provisions impacted, Mississippi is requesting flexibility under **WIOA §134(a)(2)(A), §134(a)(2)(B), and §134(a)(3)**—the same sections used by Illinois and Puerto Rico under this approved waiver. These provisions normally restrict Governor-reserved funds to statewide rapid response activities. The waiver allows Mississippi to also use these funds for **statewide employment and training activities**, including **disaster-relief employment**, when doing so is necessary to meet urgent workforce and economic recovery needs.

#### **Waiver #8. Use of Adult and Dislocated Worker Funds for Incumbent Worker Training**

After reviewing current resources and strategic priorities, Mississippi has decided not to move forward with Waiver #8. Decreased funding levels and a refocused emphasis on other high-impact initiatives have led the State to reassess the necessity of this waiver. Accordingly, Waiver #8 will no longer be included in our request to USDOL.

#### **Waiver #9. 75 Percent Out-of-School Youth (OSY) Expenditure Requirements (MDES & Locals)**

Confirm the Governor's Reserve expenditure requirement being requested.

Requesting that the 75% expenditure requirement be waived for the Governor's Reserve Youth funds to 50%.

Confirm the proposed local formula youth funds expenditure requirement.

Requesting that the 75% expenditure requirement be waived for the Local Area formula Youth funds to 50%.

Provide quantified targets for projected outcomes.

This waiver request is consistent with the MS WIOA Combined State Plan and its "no wrong door" strategies. Increasing the percentage of funding available to In-School Youth (ISY) will open doors to work experience, pre-apprenticeship programs, and career pathways for at-risk students.

**Goal 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. Approval of this waiver will allow the state to provide work-based learning opportunities, mitigate dropout behaviors, and improve student retention. Early intervention will increase attachment to the workforce and enrollment in post-secondary training.

**Goal 2:** Build on strategic partnerships to improve services and leverage resources. Approval of this waiver will enhance linkages to local education and human services agencies and maximize the use of scarce state and local resources.

The Delta LWDA will serve 50 to 60 in-school youths annually with the expectation that these youths will be work-ready upon completion of high school and prepared to meet the DWDA WIOA performance measures. For example, in their current ISY program, the participants are training for certification in pharmacy tech, CDL, and welding, which requires consistency. They are more of a somewhat captive audience, which is the opposite of out-of-school youth.

Many youths are not interested in continuing higher education, and they get lost the summer after graduating. Currently, DWDA is finding many of these youths with high school degrees who lack a desire for training in their out-of-school youth programs, perhaps due to a lag. The local area works to close this gap with stronger relationships with school counselors.

The South Central Mississippi Works LWDA uses the waiver for ISY placements and training.

The waiver has allowed them to maintain access to training and work-based learning opportunities for ISY participants, particularly as they wait for approval of a waiver allowing ITAs for In-School Youth. Several ISY students have been placed in internships and pre-apprenticeship experiences with high-demand employers in the LWDA, including Nissan North America, Precision Spine, the Grand Gulf Nuclear Station, and other advanced manufacturing, energy, and transportation companies. These internships have been a key strategy for exposing young people to high-skill career paths they otherwise would not access while still enrolled in high school.

A major factor in their success with ISY services is South Central's ability to braid WIOA funding with the statewide Career Coach program. Nearly all of the high schools in their 17-county area now have a dedicated Career Coach, and each coach is trained in WIOA eligibility. This has essentially extended their reach directly into the schools. When Career Coaches identify a student who may qualify for WIOA services, they refer them to WIN Job Center staff for support with exploration, preparation, and connection to training or employment opportunities.

This model has significantly increased early identification of eligible youth and created a seamless handoff from school-based advising to WIOA services. Without the 50/50 waiver, their ability to support ISY within this structure would be substantially limited.

OSY will continue to be the priority in Twin Districts LWDA, but they believe the partnership with ISY at high schools is increasingly important. Schools are asking for ISY partnerships, and it is needed to help students who may not have thrived during the pandemic and now may be deficient in basic skills.

A partnership between Twin Districts LWDA and Kemper County School District has provided an unprecedented opportunity for students enrolled in the Work-Based Learning program. Students have been afforded job placement previously unavailable, and employers have benefitted from the additional and much-needed workforce. The staff of the workforce area has worked closely with students to ensure that they arrive at their first interview prepared with proper job search skills and, once hired, armed with the soft skills and work ethics needed to succeed. Using the Kemper County School District model, the LWDA can easily replicate the program. It has expanded to the Hattiesburg Public School District.

Following established strategies, the state will continue to serve out-of-school youth. Adding more in-school youth funding will enhance the total number of youth served, as described in the waiver request.

### **Future Plan Built on Previous Successes**

The State of Mississippi's graduation requirements changed for students who entered the 9th grade in August 2018, and all students are required to complete a College & Career Readiness Course or 140 hours of work-based learning activities. This waiver has helped the local workforce areas provide work-based learning opportunities and career exploration, mitigate dropout behaviors, and improve student retention. Early intervention will increase attachment to the workforce and enrollment in post-secondary training. The Delta LWDA is working on an in-school pilot project that involves two youth providers and a community college. This LWDA planned expansion will require the LWDA to take advantage of the waiver.

South Central MS Works LWDA also anticipates increased impact as soon as the Youth ITA waiver is approved. They already have ISY participants identified and waiting to enter short-term credential and career pathway programs that align with regional industry demand. The 50/50 waiver has ensured that they can continue pipeline development with schools and employers while those approvals are finalized.

Overall, the waiver has been instrumental in helping South Central build and sustain youth pipelines that feed into the priority sectors and meet employer demand across the 17-county region.

Twin Districts LWDA will continue to serve OSY; nine OSY providers (including SMPDD) will continue to serve OSY, and adding In-School Youth (ISY) will be an enhancement to the total number of youth served in the Twin Districts. In PY24 Twin Districts served 284 OSY and 65 ISY. Additionally, the increase in partnerships formed serving ISY also serves as a source of referrals for OSY.

Twin Districts has been diligently working on collaborating with local school districts to expose ISY to WIOA services and in-demand occupations. The high school CTE programs provide the youth with training in a specific pathway and the WIOA youth programs provide the youth with work readiness skills training, supportive services, and connect the youth to paid work-based learning/work experience opportunities. SMPDD has strengthened its focus on serving in-school youth by recently creating an In-School Coordinator position to expand services to in-school youth across the 24-county TDWDA area.

In addition to their partnership with high school CTE and work-based learning programs, they have joined efforts with their sister program, the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District (SMPDD) High School Career Coach program funded through AccelerateMS. The High School Career Coaches work to equip students and parents with information about career options and help them navigate their future after high school. The High School Career Coaches help identify ISY that need direction towards a career path and spread awareness of programs and career opportunities, including the WIOA youth program.

All these partner programs have common goals for the same population. Together, they all work to maximize our efforts to increase awareness of in-demand occupations, increase college and career readiness, and connect ISY to work-based learning opportunities. In addition to utilizing the 50/50 waiver by increasing our in-school enrollments, these partnerships are enabling the Twin Districts to achieve our sector strategy goals, such as aligning CTE programs with Community Colleges and business needs in our area.

Provide a table comparing prior waiver goals to actual outcomes.

| Comparison of Prior Waiver Goals to Actual Outcomes |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LWDA / State                                        | Prior Goal                                                                                                                                  | Documented Outcome                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Statewide – Goal 1</b>                           | Expand Smart Start access; increase work-based learning, retention, and post-secondary enrollment.                                          | Narrative evidence of improved access and early intervention activities; however, statewide quantitative indicators are not yet documented for PY24–PY25.                                    |
| <b>Statewide – Goal 2</b>                           | Strengthen partnerships with education and human services to leverage resources.                                                            | Nearly all high schools Statewide now have Career Coaches trained in WIOA eligibility; improved student referrals and seamless handoff to WIOA services.                                     |
| <b>Delta LWDA</b>                                   | Serve 50–60 ISY annually; ensure youth become work-ready; provide training in pharmacy tech, CDL, and welding.                              | 66 ISY served to date in PY25; youth training in healthcare fields including CNA and dental assisting; successful training continues in welding, pharmacy tech, and welding.                 |
| <b>South Central MS Works LWDA</b>                  | Expand ISY placements and maintain access to training/WBL while awaiting ISY-ITA approval; strengthen pipelines with schools and employers. | Several ISY placed in internships with high-demand employers (Nissan, Precision Spine, Grand Gulf Nuclear Station, etc.); early identification increased via Career Coach network.           |
| <b>Twin Districts LWDA</b>                          | Maintain OSY priority but increase ISY partnerships with high schools; expand CTE and WBL integration; replicate Kemper County model.       | PY24 served 284 OSY and 65 ISY; PY25 (to date) served 189 OSY and 41 ISY; ISY partnerships now generating OSY referrals; model expanded to Hattiesburg Public School District.               |
| <b>Mississippi Partnership LWDA (historical)</b>    | Expand number of work-ready students and deepen industry partnerships.                                                                      | ISY served increased from 134 (PY18) to 270 (PY19); ISY percentage rose from 40.78% → 44.42% in PY20; ISY percentage in PY25 (to date) = 26.3%; positive youth performance trends mentioned. |

### Waiver #10. Modifying In-School and Out-of-School Youth Expenditure Target Calculation (MDES)

Provide quantified targets for projected outcomes.

ISY > 25% statewide (via aggregation) with a local ISY maximum of 50%.

Forecasted outcomes:

- Anticipated increase in In-School Youth (ISY) participation.
- Youth performance outcomes (credential attainment, employment, etc.) maintained or improved across most WIOA Youth indicators

### Waiver #11. Modifying Training Requirements for Dislocated Workers' Needs-Related Payments

Provide quantified targets for projected outcomes.

After reviewing current resources and strategic priorities, Mississippi has decided not to move forward with Waiver #11. Decreased funding levels and a refocused emphasis on other high-impact initiatives have led the State to reassess the necessity of this waiver. Accordingly, Waiver #11 will no longer be included in our request to USDOL.

## **Waiver #12. Providing In-School Youth with Individual Training Accounts**

Provide quantified targets for projected outcomes.

50% of Youth ITAs could be used for ISY

## **Waiver #13. Extending Post-Exit Supportive Services Beyond 12 Months (Robin/Possible Removal)**

After reviewing current resources and strategic priorities, Mississippi has decided not to move forward with Waiver #13. Decreased funding levels and a refocused emphasis on other high-impact initiatives have led the State to reassess the necessity of this waiver. Accordingly, Waiver #13 will no longer be included in our request to USDOL.

## **Waiver #15. Increasing On-the-Job Training Employer Reimbursement (Robin/Possible Removal)**

Provide quantified targets for projected outcomes.

After reviewing current resources and strategic priorities, Mississippi has decided not to move forward with Waiver #15. Decreased funding levels and a refocused emphasis on other high-impact initiatives have led the State to reassess the necessity of this waiver. Accordingly, Waiver #15 will no longer be included in our request to USDOL.

## **Waiver #16. Youth Program Elements**

Provide quantified targets for projected outcomes.

To ensure equitable access to high-quality youth programming, Mississippi projects that **up to 50 percent of In-School Youth (ISY) funds** may be allocated to serve ISY who demonstrate aptitude and interest in career pathways but are unable to provide the required income documentation. This target is based on historical enrollment patterns showing that a significant share of otherwise-eligible students—particularly those whose parents decline to provide required income information—are prevented from accessing WIOA services solely due to documentation barriers.

Mississippi will track:

- The **percentage of ISY funds** used to support this population,
- The **number of ISY served** under the waiver,
- Resulting **credential attainment, measurable skill gains, and placement outcomes.**

These metrics will be reported annually to ensure transparency and alignment with WIOA performance accountability requirements.

Confirm how the state will determine which elements will or will not be available in each local area.

Mississippi will maintain statewide access to all 14 WIOA youth program elements; the waiver does not eliminate any element. Instead, it provides **flexibility to local workforce areas** in determining the **degree to which each element is emphasized** based on labor market conditions, youth needs, and regional service capacity.

Under the waiver, Mississippi will:

- Allow **all local workforce development areas** to serve otherwise-eligible ISY who cannot provide income documentation, ensuring consistent access statewide.
- Require each local area to conduct an **annual assessment** of youth needs, employer demand, and existing service gaps to determine which elements should be prioritized.
- Maintain a statewide baseline that ensures:
  - All 14 elements remain *available*;
  - Local areas may **modify delivery models**, partnerships, and investment levels to focus on high-impact elements such as work-based learning, occupational skills training, and supportive services;
  - Local flexibility does not reduce access for priority populations.

The State will provide oversight through monitoring, data review, and technical assistance to ensure that local decisions remain aligned with WIOA goals and that youth continue to receive the necessary combination of program elements to support successful outcomes.

## 2026 Mississippi Waiver: Revised Waiver Request #16 (7/2/2026)

### Waiver #16. Youth Program Elements

Provide quantified targets for projected outcomes.

Mississippi will track:

- Resulting **credential attainment, measurable skill gains, and placement outcomes**.
- This waiver will allow the state to meet the statewide agreed upon measures of:
  - **Employment Rate Q2 of 83.3%,**
  - **Employment Rate Q4 of 84.9% (a 1.0 % increase),**
  - **Median Earnings Q2 of \$3,900,**
  - **Credential Attainment Rate of 76.0%, and**
  - **Measurable Skill Gains of 73.4% (a 5.8% increase).**
- The waiver will also allow local areas that are not meeting the statewide goals the flexibility to make improvements toward the statewide goals.

These metrics will be reported annually to ensure transparency and alignment with WIOA performance accountability requirements.

Confirm how the state will determine which elements will or will not be available in each local area.

Mississippi will maintain statewide access to all 14 WIOA youth program elements; the waiver does not eliminate any element. Instead, it provides **flexibility to local workforce areas** in determining the **degree to which each element is emphasized** based on labor market conditions, youth needs, and regional service capacity.

Under the waiver, Mississippi will:

- Require each local area to conduct an **annual assessment** of youth needs, employer demand, and existing service gaps to determine which elements should be prioritized.
- Maintain a statewide baseline that ensures:
  - All 14 elements remain *available*;
  - Local areas may **modify delivery models**, partnerships, and investment levels to focus on high-impact elements such as work-based learning, occupational skills training, and supportive services;

- Local flexibility does not reduce access for priority populations.

The State will provide oversight through monitoring, data review, and technical assistance to ensure that local decisions remain aligned with WIOA goals and that youth continue to receive the necessary combination of program elements to support successful outcomes.