

Baltimore is making strides in work force development

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Today has been designated as a national Workforce Day of Action. Over a dozen associations including Jobs for the Future, National Skills Coalition, United States Conference of Mayors and the National Association of Workforce Boards have joined forces to send a strong message: Workforce development programs are essential to our country's economic recovery and job creation effort.

All across America, workforce professionals in partnership with employers are training workers for existing and emerging high-demand jobs. This is evident in Maryland, as Gov. Martin O'Malley, just last week, highlighted workforce development as one of his top four federal priorities for the upcoming fiscal year in his Maryland Forward presentation to the state's federal delegation. The governor encouraged our Congressional representatives to push for the reauthorization of the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and to ensure funding would be available to put Marylanders to work, improve student achievement and college/career readiness, and increase the number residents trained with the skills our 21st century economy demands.

Under the direction of Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Baltimore City is well-prepared to help Governor O'Malley achieve these objectives. By partnering with leaders in business, economic development, education and human services, we have honed a workforce development system that is putting people in jobs now and launching their careers through effective employment training. In short, we create taxpayers and support the growth of businesses.

During the past 18 months thousands of city residents received job training and placement assistance through more than 200,000 visits to our three one-stop career centers. Despite the slow economic recovery, more than 4,000 people got jobs. Career counselors at these centers target citizens' specific skills and skills gaps and help them create customized paths toward sustainable employment. Our professional staff help people who have been laid off learn new skills and transfer their existing ones into new areas of employment. They offer computer literacy, resume writing and interviewing workshops to those who need to upgrade these vital skills. Job search and placement assistance is available to people no matter where they are on their career paths, and we provide experiential opportunities through on-the-job and occupational training, internships and scholarships in high-growth industries.

The time to act is now. We must be able to continue to provide these valuable resources to raise the skill levels of our residents, promote our economic recovery and grow the success of our local businesses.

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