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**TWO-YEAR LOCAL PLAN UPDATE**

**March 15, 2019**

**Submitted by: Workforce Development Board of Ventura County**

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## SECTION 3 – LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

### Introduction

In February 2017, the Workforce Development Board of Ventura County (WDBVC) submitted a four-year **WIOA Local Plan** to the California Workforce Development Board. That plan, in tandem with a **WIOA Regional Plan** submitted at the same time, outlined the County’s vision, objectives and strategies for supporting an appropriately-skilled workforce ready and able to meet the changing business needs of area employers. In the Local Plan, which remains in effect through 2020, the Board described three primary policy objectives: fostering demand-driven skills attainment; enabling upward mobility for the Ventura County workforce; and aligning, coordinating and integrating programs and services to economize limited resources. These are consistent with the goals and objectives outlined in the California Workforce Development Board’s State Plan, “*Skills Attainment for Upward Mobility; Aligned Services for Shared Prosperity.*”

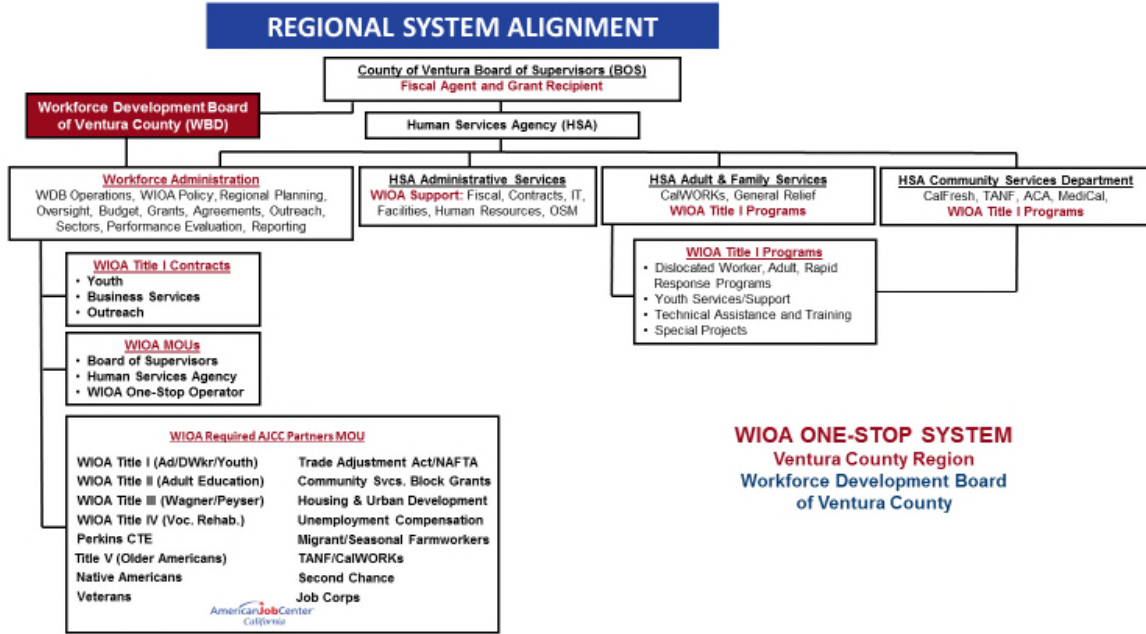
A total of nineteen AJCC partner organizations signed Memoranda of Agreement in accordance with that plan, and have subsequently worked closely to build an integrated and fully-aligned workforce development system in Ventura County. The AJCC’s co-located partners, which include EDD, HSA/CSD and CalWORKs/TANF, have identified ways to deliver services efficiently and effectively through the use of shared data systems and in-person collaboration on items such as staff coordination, joint training, and the delivery of workshops to shared populations. Each of the mandated partners has relationships with multiple community-based organizations that have themselves become integrated into the AJCC constellation of services for specific target populations; new CBOs are solicited on an ongoing basis as appropriate.

The four-year Local Plan was developed over a period of six months, with the active participation of several dozen local agencies and organizations, as well as many private individuals, in a total of 75 public meetings. Each of those organizations and individuals, as well as many others, were invited to participate in the development of this two-year update to the Local Plan; email invites were sent to 3,832 individuals, organizations and employers. Some participated in an evening meeting to review the plan update process, the State Board’s priorities, and new local collaborations. Others provided written material or took part in one of several smaller meetings on specific topics related to the plan updates. The result is a Two-Year Local Plan Update which addresses CWDB’s guidance and expectations while meeting the County’s need to make plan adjustments and modifications in response to local conditions.

A detailed description of WDBVC’s plan update process is included as **Attachment 1: Stakeholder Engagement and Community Outreach Efforts**. The Local Board has a strong track record of community engagement, and supports the state’s desire to do more than merely comply with public notice requirements. Toward that end, the WDBVC utilized the California Workforce Association’s approved provider list to identify a consultant with specific expertise in community engagement, the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW). CSW first met with WDBVC staff in November; a series of meetings began the following month, some of them public, some internal working sessions, culminating in an evening public meeting on January 31, 2019, which in turn triggered the first of two public comment periods.

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WDBVC and its stakeholders view this plan update process as a welcome and unprecedented opportunity to address poverty in Ventura County in a meaningful and measurable way by focusing the workforce system on the needs of those most in need of its services. We support the state in this goal of generating upward mobility, and look forward to working together to make a real difference in the lives of low-income residents of our county.



### CalFresh E&T Partnership

The centerpiece of this Local Plan Update is a new working relationship between the WDBVC and Ventura County Human Service Agency’s CalFresh operation. While past collaborations in this arena have centered on relatively small, specific target populations (CalWORKs participants; work-mandated General Relief recipients), the new partnership outlined in this document reflects an overarching agreement to focus on meeting the needs of the overall CalFresh population (60,000 individuals; 30,000 adults).

Ventura County has a significant structural advantage in this regard, as both the Workforce Development Board and CalFresh operate under the county umbrella, have worked together for years, and already have co-located services at the AJCC. While the partnership envisioned here takes that collaboration to a new level, with a much broader focus, it does not require a new MOU or other formal partnership, as both entities are already obligated to work together as county entities within the Human

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Service Agency, and are already convinced of the benefit of doing so. A simple internal county operating agreement, spelling out expectations and objectives, is anticipated.

Given the eligibility requirements for CalFresh, it serves well as a proxy for “low-income,” and is thus central to the County’s efforts to impact poverty. Although priority-of-service already exists for recipients of public assistance and other low-income individuals, WDBVC and the Human Service Agency see this new relationship as an opportunity to ensure that the workforce development system actually contributes to a measurable reduction in poverty in the region.

Beginning in late 2018 and continuing through the submission of this document, the Ventura County Human Service Agency and its CalFresh E&T partners have participated actively in the development of the two-year local plan update, working closely with WDBVC staff to identify ways to better serve the CalFresh population and low-income residents generally. While coordination efforts have grown in recent years, and a Memorandum of Understanding already exists between the Human Service Agency and the AJCC, this Local Plan Update represents an expansion of that collaboration and a strong commitment to meeting the needs of low-income Ventura County residents. The stakeholders appreciate CWDB making this a priority, encouraging local collaboration and supporting deeper integration at the county level.

Following an initial meeting with Ventura County Human Service Agency leadership in December 2018, the WDBVC invited community-based organizations, service providers, community colleges and county departments to an evening meeting in January to outline the process, review the current plans, and discuss the priorities for the two-year update. Over a dozen organizations and agencies attended that meeting. The WDBVC views each of these organizations as partners in the development of the update, and therefore in the workforce development system going forward.

A detailed assessment of Ventura County’s CalFresh population and its needs related to workforce development is included as **Attachment 2: CalFresh Partnership**. It shows that there are more than 30,000 adults receiving CalFresh benefits in the county, and that a significant portion of that total could benefit from greater access to workforce development services.

One noteworthy finding is that 43% of CalFresh households receive employment income yet still have incomes low enough to qualify for food assistance. Some work in very low-wage jobs, insufficient to lift their families out of poverty; others work part-time, whether by choice or not. In any case, working part-time, at low wages, or not working at all, our strategies for successfully serving such individuals will need to include a range of “earn and learn” options. While some may be able to maintain their employment during training, many will not, particularly those working irregular shifts. Few jobs can accommodate intensive education or training schedules, yet few people can afford to go without income for the length of time it takes to complete a job training or education program.

WDBVC’s current four year WIOA Local Plan strongly supports the “earn and learn” approach of combining training and education with compensated applied learning opportunities. The success of such models depends on sustained employer engagement, and, often, the engagement of organized labor as well. The Board has identified eight apprenticeship programs in the region, and is working to expand that number.

More than 16% of the population of Ventura County is limited English proficient; most of those are Spanish-speakers. Among the CalFresh population, 26% of households are Spanish-speaking. Outreach to Spanish-speakers has long been a priority for WDBVC, and will continue to be a focus as we explore outreach strategies for CalFresh recipients. The Ventura County Adult Education Consortium, which includes the Community College District, the eight Adult Schools, and the Ventura County Office of

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Education, is already working with WDBVC to expand ESL services, including both literacy and numeracy classes as well as short-term training combined with contextualized literacy instruction.

Coordination of intake and assessment for core programs was identified in the four-year WIOA Local Plan as a system priority, with co-enrollment as a key strategy. The WDBVC and its partners are now looking at ways to efficiently align intake and enrollment practices beyond those core programs to encompass other partners, while still respecting the needs and requirements of each program. The process of developing this Local Plan Update has highlighted several areas where small modifications in intake procedures could bring significant benefits for individual customers, and for the workforce development system as a whole.

For example, this plan update process has underscored the need for a modification in the intake protocol of the AJCC. While many AJCC customers are CalFresh recipients, AJCC staff have not historically been asked to enter CalFresh information into CalJobs. As a result, it is not possible to accurately gauge the current level of service to CalFresh recipients. Going forward, the AJCC will track CalFresh participation, and – equally important – will assist customers who are CalFresh-eligible but not enrolled to access that critical benefit.

WDBVC has an active Outreach Committee which continuously enhances awareness of and access to workforce development services. New outreach strategies to reach the CalFresh population will be developed and implemented as needed. WDBVC will partner with CalFresh and the Human Services Agency to develop a marketing and outreach campaign specifically aimed at CalFresh recipients. In addition, building on the base established through our existing TANF/CalWORKS partnership, CalFresh will become a standing agenda item at the AJCC's bi-monthly Partners meeting. Through this venue, we will ensure collaboration at both the policy level and the day-to-day practice of front-line staff, sharing diagnostic and performance data on an ongoing basis. Regular, structured communication between partners aimed at addressing pressing, concrete issues through collaborative problem-solving will be essential to making this broadened partnership work.

As the current four-year Local Plan states, services provided by program partners in support of program core competencies facilitate the braiding of resources to ensure access to a comprehensive menu of services tailored to individual needs. The WDBVC and local CalFresh officials are exploring options for braiding or blending funding to better serve low-income residents. CalFresh E&T funds can't be used to pay tuition, so one possibility under consideration is for WIOA to cover an individual's tuition, while using CalFresh funds to offer generous (but necessary) support services.

Support services are critical to the success of low-income job-seekers. Under current policies, dependent on the availability of funding, program participants are eligible for transportation assistance, books and training supplies, tools required for employment, clothing, and vision/optical services, among other things. Need-related payments are allowed for WIOA-funded training only, and certain other limitations apply. Braided funding could permit some of those limitations to be lifted, allowing the flexibility to provide critical supports that can mean the difference between success and failure. Through their MOUs, the nineteen AJCC partners have agreed to integrate service delivery and braid resources to ensure access to a comprehensive menu of services tailored to each individual's needs. CalFresh and Child Support Services are now part of this ongoing effort to collaborate for the benefit of our mutual clients.

The Human Service Agency is currently exploring a procurement to select qualified providers to pilot a new SNAP 50% reimbursement program in Ventura County. This will involve identifying providers who are already offering eligible workforce services to CalFresh recipients using non-federal funding, and

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then assisting those providers in documenting that service and incorporating it into the local CalFresh plan, as well as the SNAP E&T Plan the state submits to the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service each August. Toward this end, the Human Service Agency is hosting a webinar in March 2019 led by the Seattle Jobs Initiative, national pioneers of the SNAP E&T 50% reimbursement model.

The County's goal is not to create a new 'siloes' program targeting CalFresh recipients, but instead to use all available resources to build a unified, comprehensive workforce system that serves all residents in need, including low-income food-assistance recipients. This means creating access for low-income residents to the sector-based pathway programs established by the WDBVC in Manufacturing, Health Care, Clean/Green and Business Services. It also means providing them with the support services necessary to ensure their retention in those programs, and their successful progression into family-sustaining careers.

VCHSA has worked with community-based organizations for many years to serve at risk populations with barriers to employment by aligning training, education and supportive services. Current CBO partners include Goodwill Industries, El Concilio, Food Share, Mixteco Indigenous Community Outreach Program (MICOP), United Way, Clinicas Del Camino Real, and Gold Coast Veteran's Foundation. Multiple opportunities are anticipated for additional CBOs to respond to RFPs for future services.

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### Department of Child Support Services Partnership

As with CalFresh, the local Department of Child Support Services has played a major role in developing this Local Plan Update. DCSS has worked hard in recent years to transition from a punitive approach toward non-custodial parents to a more supportive one, and in doing so, had already begun to build bridges to the workforce development system and the AJCC. DCSS staff realize that most non-custodial parents are inevitably going to view them as enforcers of child support obligations, rendering them less-than-ideal messengers for the benefits of workforce development services. At the same time, DCSS workers understand that well-paid employment is the only real way for such parents to reach the point where they can in fact support their families. DCSS has therefore fully embraced the notion of a close working partnership with WDBVC, and contributed a number of the new ideas contained in this document.

DCSS participated in the January 31<sup>st</sup> evening meeting, as well as a series of planning discussions from December through March, and provided WDBVC with a wealth of data regarding non-custodial parents in Ventura County. The data show that there are 17,621 non-custodial parents currently being tracked by DCSS. More than half identify as Hispanic; slightly under 15% are primarily Spanish-speaking. The exact overlap with the 30,000 adults receiving CalFresh is not yet known, but it is assumed by both CalFresh and DCSS to be significant.

There are a number of barriers presented by non-custodial parents, as discussed in **Attachment 3: Department of Child Support Services Partnership**. These include the typical barriers found among low-income job-seekers in general, along with inevitable disincentives built into the child support system, including the fact that a significant share of any new income is likely to go to cover arrearages in child support. Successfully reaching this population requires acknowledging those issues and, where possible, crafting flexible approaches. Appendix C also identifies a number of services and supports that are necessary in order for non-custodial parents to be successful in meeting their parental obligations and in securing long-term, well-paid work.

In the past, DCSS caseworkers have provided individual non-custodial parents with written information about workforce services, as well as referrals to the AJCC for anyone interested. While this has proven helpful to some individuals, it has not happened in a systematic or comprehensive way, and has not resulted in large numbers of non-custodial parents seeking workforce services. The process of developing this Local Plan Update has clarified for all parties the need for a closer collaboration between WDBVC and DCSS.

Going forward, what is needed is a more wholistic collaboration which works closely with each individual, responds quickly to their needs or to changes in their situation, builds confidence and satisfaction with their work/life balance, and tracks them from initial enrollment to successful placement in a good job and beyond. An aggressive income maximization approach, along with ample opportunities for paid training, will necessarily be a key strategy for meeting the needs of non-custodial parents and their families. More generous transportation assistance could also make a difference for many individuals. For those with criminal records, a well-vetted 'felon-friendly' employer list, as discussed in our Two Year Regional Plan Update, is essential.

Through this plan update process, the WDBVC, DCSS and related partners have agreed that they will meet regularly, and will share information on a monthly basis, regarding progress toward the goal of

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reaching all non-custodial parents with information about workforce services, as well as any issues that arise. WDBVC will partner with DCSS and the Human Services Agency to develop and implement marketing and outreach strategies to reach this population. DCSS will participate in AJCC Partner meetings as well. Participants who have been placed in jobs will be tracked and supported for one year to ensure job retention, and provided with quick assistance in the event of job loss. The WDBVC and DCSS have agreed to pilot this collaboration for an initial target group of at least 50 non-custodial parents, with the DCSS caseworker and the AJCC counselor communicating directly with each other, the client, the service provider(s), and the employer on an ongoing basis. Maximizing the use of the temporary garnishment-reduction option, and/or reducing the amount owed in arrears, will be a critical incentivizing element of the strategy.

Creating a comprehensive system of services for noncustodial parents will require both a strong relationship between WDBVC and DCSS leadership and a close ongoing working relationship at the front-line staff level. The issues presented by the population will become a cross-training topic for AJCC staff; DCSS staff must become skilled at raising the issue of employment with clients and at effecting a warm referral to a career counselor at the appropriate point. Low-wage employment is insufficient to solve the non-custodial parent's financial dilemma. Both agencies must work together to ensure that noncustodial parents find their way into the kinds of jobs that can actually allow them to support themselves and their families.

There are currently no eligibility criteria for workforce services that would prevent the WDBVC or the AJCC from providing services to non-custodial parents, and no plans to enact such criteria. According to DCSS, a primary obstacle to participation for this population appears to be a desire among some noncustodial parents to avoid earning a reportable income. In this sense, motivation is a significant factor for at least some non-custodial parents. While some can be compelled, through job search orders, to participate in workforce services, a more successful strategy is likely to be educating participants about opportunities to find employment at wages high enough to actually allow them to support their families. Outreach strategies will therefore focus on helping non-custodial parents understand the benefit of participating in workforce services that can lead to family-sustaining jobs.

Time and distance are two significant obstacles to the partnership envisioned here between the WDBVC and DCSS. Ventura County comprises 1,873 square miles, and includes multiple urban areas as well as significant unincorporated and/or agricultural land. Offices are spread out between Ventura, Oxnard, Camarillo and Simi Valley. Bringing staff physically together on a regular basis is challenging. Even finding the time for everyone to participate in regular conference calls is difficult, pitting the time constraints of everyone's 'day job' against the need for frequent conversations between partners. Minimizing these challenges does not make them go away; the solution will lie in creating efficient and effective structures. Some information, such as routine updates, can be handled by email or newsletter. Conference calls, and especially in-person meetings, should not be devoted to simple updates, but rather to actual work tasks and decision-making. Ensuring the best use of everyone's valuable time will be essential.

Retention in programs is obviously critical to success in the labor market. This starts with a thorough and accurate assessment, to make sure that people are being placed in appropriate programs for which they are ready. Wrap-around case management and support services are necessary to ensure that minor issues don't develop into major crises. Active job placement, followed by strong post-placement support, will similarly serve to make sure that job placements stick, or (in the event they don't) that follow-up placement happens in a timely manner.



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Existing partnerships, while somewhat limited and ad hoc, have enabled DCSS, the AJCC and the WDBVC to begin working together, and have formed the basis on which this new partnership is being built. What is new going forward is that there will be an operating agreement between those parties, both to try some immediate collaborations and to work together over time to expand those efforts. DCSS is exploring the possibility of placing a satellite team at the AJCC part-time; likewise, the AJCC will experiment with conducting outreach to non-custodial parents attending child-support hearings at the courtroom, as well as at the DCSS genetic testing room and lobby. DCSS has added a link to its website informing participants about the AJCC, and more such on-line connections are in the works. Additional stakeholders include Ventura County's three community colleges, the network of adult education providers, and a range of community-based organizations and social enterprises that touch this population. Possibilities to braid funding to better serve non-custodial parents are under discussion.

Historically, Goodwill Industries has been the CBO with the strongest track record of serving the non-custodial population in Ventura County. Community-based organizations play a key role in Ventura County's workforce development system, and are routinely made aware of opportunities to seek funding or participate in other ways in workforce efforts. It is anticipated that the new emphasis on reaching more low-income residents, including non-custodial parents, will lead to new openings for CBOs to participate.

The stakeholders involved in developing this plan have reached agreement that they need to bring their intake and referral processes into alignment with each other in order to be effective. A shared mailbox, calendar, and MS Access database have been proposed, and are currently under review to ensure they meet privacy and related concerns. Joint staff-training webinars are also in development.

As noted above, DCSS has agreed to work with the WDBVC and the AJCC to identify tools and incentives that can be used to encourage non-custodial parents to participate in workforce development programs. While there are some enforcement tools that can be used in this regard, such as court orders, both CSS and the WDBVC are focused on developing more positive incentives. The goal is to help non-custodial parents understand and accept the opportunity being presented to them: the chance to prepare for, and obtain, employment at wages that can actually allow them to meet their family financial obligations. Incentives such as gift cards and small bonuses for completing programs are helpful tools, but the real, long-term motivating factor is the pride inherent in being able to step up and provide for one's family.

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### Competitive Integrated Employment Updated Partnership

A very active partnership currently exists between the workforce system, the Department of Rehabilitation, and community-based providers on Competitive Integrated Employment. DOR has had a seat on the WDBVC for many years, as well as representation on multiple board committees, and is already a core partner in the AJCC, resulting in a great deal of attention being paid to job-seekers with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities. WDBVC is committed not just to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, but to making every effort to provide accommodation for the needs of every person with a disability.

The Oxnard/Ventura and Thousand Oaks branches of DOR's Santa Barbara District, Tri-Counties Regional Center, the Ventura County Office of Education, local school districts, non-public schools, and more than fifty community partners, such as Goodwill, PathPoint, Jay Nolan Community Services and the ARC of Ventura County, work closely to meet the needs of people with disabilities. A new partnership is underway to bring the College of the Canyon's "Uniquely Abled" program to Camarillo.

The Workforce Development Board played a lead role in developing the Local Partnership Agreement, with the board's DOR representative serving as a principal author. AJCC and other workforce staff have been trained on topics such as: *What is DOR*; *Who does DOR serve*; and *Disability Etiquette*. The 'Windmills' program has been used to explore and improve attitudes towards people with disabilities. DOR staff are out-stationed 2 days a week at the AJCC. There is, however, room to expand staff training specific to ID/DD, and to repeat the training for new staff as they come aboard.

There are multiple points of contact between DOR and the workforce system. At the highest level, the two supervisors of the Oxnard/Ventura branch of DOR share this responsibility, the supervisor of the Ventura unit serving on the Workforce Development Board and its subcommittees, and both supervisors representing DOR at various AJCC events and meetings. Other DOR staff participate as well, on youth teams and other working groups. Outreach to employers occurs through DOR and its vendors, such as Goodwill, PathPoint, and Jay Nolan, which offer supported employment services and intensive job coaching for individuals placed in jobs.

As noted, work is currently underway to bring the "Uniquely Abled" program, serving individuals on the autism spectrum, to Ventura County. Another projected enhancement involves job fairs for individuals with developmental disabilities, which currently happen twice a year at the Ventura County Office of Education; the new plan is to bring at least one of these on site at the AJCC. As discussed above, there is also a need to take ID/DD training further, in the spirit of providing truly integrated services.

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### **Provisions to English Language Learners, the Foreign Born and Refugees**

English Language Learners – primarily Spanish-speakers, but several other languages as well – have historically made up a significant portion of Ventura County’s population, and thus have long been a focus of the WDBVC’s outreach and service efforts, as reflected in both the four-year Local Plan and this two-year update. More than 41% of the county’s population is Hispanic/Latino, and slightly over 16% report limited English language ability. The CalFresh population is 26% Spanish-speaking (32% of all individuals). Non-custodial parents served by the Department of Child Support Services show similar demographics: 51% are Spanish-speaking; 14% speak Spanish only.

The organizations invited to participate in the plan update process included several organizations that exclusively or primarily serve the Latino community, as well as the Community College District and the eight adult education schools in the county, which have for some time prioritized services to the limited-English population. Most recently, the Oxnard Adult School began offering free ESL classes on site at the AJCC, with a focus on preparation for citizenship interviews, post-secondary preparation, and employment. Many other service providers in the county reach this population, and were among those included in the initial email invitation for the January 31<sup>st</sup> evening meeting and subsequent planning meetings. In all of its programs and activities, the WDBVC works to ensure that English Language Learners, refugees and the foreign-born are welcomed, accommodated, and provided with any specific additional assistance necessary for their success. Translation services are always available upon request.

### **Other Changes to Local Plans Pursuant to Changes in Labor Market or Economic Conditions**

No changes are required at this time to the current four year WIOA Local Plan (2017-2021), or to negotiated performance goals. In less than a year, we will begin the process of developing our next four year WIOA Local Plan, which will be begin with a comprehensive labor market analysis. The most significant recent economic event concerns the impact of the Woolsey and Hill fires, which devastated large sections of Ventura County last year. WDBVC and the Human Services Agency devoted considerable effort over the past several months to assisting the victims of those fires. It is too soon, however, to know whether these events will have a lasting impact on the local economy.

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### **Attachment 1: Stakeholder Engagement and Community Outreach Efforts**

The Workforce Development Board of Ventura County (WDBVC) applauds the California Workforce Development Board for establishing community outreach expectations that go beyond those of the Brown Act, and has worked hard to comply with both the letter and the spirit of those requirements in the development of this Two-Year Local Plan Update. To facilitate the plan update process and ensure that community input would exceed previous efforts, the WDBVC procured the services of a consulting firm, the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, with specific expertise in community engagement. Following an initial meeting of key Ventura County Human Services Agency **CalFresh** and **Child Support Services** stakeholders in late 2018, the WDBVC held an evening meeting on January 31, 2019 at the AJCC in Oxnard which was publicized widely to all community members. The State Board was notified in advance of that meeting, and multiple email notices went out to 3,832 individuals and organizations. Communications staff created Public Service Announcements, and worked with the Ventura County Star (circulation 45,000) to ensure that an article appeared one week prior to the meeting.

Stakeholder meetings continued throughout the planning period. Mandatory stakeholders such as **VCHSA CalFresh**, **Child Support Services** and the **Department of Rehabilitation** became partners in the drafting of this plan, with weekly check-ins and follow-up conversations to ensure that all questions were given careful deliberation and answered in full. Stakeholders came to the table with many ideas about how the various parties could collaborate in the provision of services and work together going forward. The group worked to prioritize these and to incorporate the team's best thinking into this update. The WDBVC held a final public session at its regular board meeting on February 28<sup>th</sup> to review the draft plan update and finalize it for submission.

The **VCHSA CalFresh** team participated in the initial 2018 stakeholder meeting, and quickly responded to an initial request for data from the WDBVC. This led to ongoing engagement, as WDBVC reviewed the preliminary data and submitted a series of follow-up requests for clarification and additional information. VCHSA CalFresh was forthcoming with all of the information sought, and worked with WDBVC staff and the consultant to interpret the data and draw conclusions regarding the implications for the workforce development system. The VCHSA CalFresh team has expressed excitement at the prospect of working more closely with the WDBVC to ensure that all CalFresh recipients have access to the kinds of workforce development services that can begin to lift them out of poverty.

VCHSA CalFresh staff also participated in the January 31<sup>st</sup> evening meeting, offering an overview of the program and outlining their vision of a closer working partnership with the WDBVC and community partners. The VCHSA CalFresh representative at that meeting entertained a series of audience questions, and helped move the room toward an understanding and appreciation of the issues involved and the opportunities under consideration. VCHSA CalFresh staff reviewed drafts of the Local Update and offered editorial suggestions in the interest of nuance and accuracy.

A team of local **Child Support Services** staff also participated in the initial 2018 stakeholder meeting, and the Deputy Director was the first guest speaker at the January 31<sup>st</sup> evening meeting. Following a presentation by the WDBVC Director on the plan and update, the DCSS Deputy Director articulated a strong desire to connect with the workforce system in ways that benefit non-custodial parents and their families. Overlap between the CSS population and the CalFresh population became a major focus of the

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evening’s discussion. Community members and providers spent the meeting brainstorming on ways to better meet the needs of Ventura County’s low-income residents, and how to build stronger partnerships to make that happen.

The **Department of Rehabilitation** is already a mandated **partner** in the local workforce development system, with a seat on the WDBVC and representation on multiple committees. CIE service providers were represented at the January 31<sup>st</sup> evening meeting, as well as other planning meetings during the process of developing this update. As noted above, notice of the meeting, and the plan update process, was sent to 3,832 individuals and organizations in Ventura County, including all providers of services to persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities. The 50 organizations that participated in the development of the CIE LPA were among those organizations.

**English Language Learners** constitute a significant portion of the Ventura County population, and are a primary focus of both the WDBVC’s four-year WIOA Local Plan and this two-year update. More than 41% of the county’s population is Hispanic/Latino, and slightly over 16% report limited English language ability. The CalFresh population is 26% Spanish-speaking. Among the organizations invited to participate in the plan update process were several organizations that serve the Latino community, as well as the eight adult education schools in the county, which have prioritized services to the limited-English population. In addition, many other service providers in the county reach this population, and were among those included in the initial email invitation for the January 31<sup>st</sup> evening meeting and subsequent planning meetings. The WDBVC provides accommodations for disabilities and interpreting services for all public meetings as needed and requested by the public.

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### Attachment 2: CalFresh Partnership

As of January 2019, there were a total of 59,481 individuals receiving CalFresh food assistance in Ventura County, of which 29,188 were children and 30,293 were adults. Coincidentally, the number of adults corresponds closely with the number of CalFresh households: 30,393. However, the population exhibits a wide diversity of household type, including everything from single-parent families with multiple children to households with multiple adults and no dependent children.

At more than 30,000 adults, this potentially represents a substantial low-income target population for workforce development services. Even if we assume that many of those age 60+ are not looking for work, that still leaves well over 25,000 individuals. Not everyone will be interested in employment services at any given point in time, and some people are already being served, but the numbers suggest that there must be several thousand adults, at a minimum, who would benefit from a closer connection between CalFresh and the workforce system.

CalFresh is household-based, rather than family-based. Although many nuclear families are CalFresh recipients, CalFresh households are based on 'who purchases and prepares food together.' A household may comprise several unrelated individuals, such as roommates who eat together; many households include extended family members or multi-generational families. By the same token, homes with two or more adults do not necessarily represent two parents with children. Current CalFresh demographics based on February 2019 data for Ventura County show:

- *Total CalFresh Households: 30,393*
- *Total CalFresh Participants: 59,481 (30,293 adults + 29,188 children)*
- *Number of single-adult households: 15,180*
- *Households with two or more adults: 4,024*
- *Households with one adult with children: 6,586*
- *Number of children age 0-4: 8,157 (28% of all children)*
- *Number of children age 5-9: 9,197 (31% of all children)*
- *Number of children age 10-14: 9,064 (31% of all children)*
- *Number of children age 15-17: 3,990 (14% of all children)*
- *Households with Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD): 5,894*
- *Number of Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD): 6,014 (20% of adults)*
- *Households with elderly individuals (60+): 5,741 (19% of households)*
- *Number of elderly individuals (60+): 6,755 (22% of adults)*
- *Households with disabled individuals: 4,689 (16% of households)*
- *Number of disabled individuals under the age of 60: 937*
- *Households with an ineligible non-citizen: 4,839*
- *Households with earned income: 13,203 (43% of households)*
- *Number of individuals with earned income: 15,026 (50% of adult individuals)*
- *Households with disability-based income (SSA, Workers Comp, SDI etc.): 4,514*
- *English-speaking households: 22,040 (73% of total households)*
- *Spanish-speaking households: 8,044 (26% of total households)*
- *Number of primarily Spanish-speaking individuals: 2,303*
- *Primary language other than English or Spanish: 309*

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Because there are no education eligibility requirements for the CalFresh program, no data is currently collected regarding CalFresh participant education levels. An unknown but significant portion of the 18+ population lacks a high school diploma, suggesting a need for adult education services that can prepare individuals for the HiSet test. With 26% of CalFresh households indicating Spanish as a primary language, the data suggests a significant language barrier for some portion of that population.

The current local CalFresh E&T program is very small, and targets only the work-mandated General Relief subset of the ABAWD population. During the initial CalFresh/General Relief application process, a Client Benefit Specialist screens each applicant to determine if they meet a work registration exemption or if they are required to be work-registered with the E&T program. Work exemptions include, but are not limited to:

- Under age 16 or over 59;
- Attending school or training at least half-time;
- Physically or mentally unfit for employment;
- Pregnancy for women;
- Caring for an incapacitated person;
- Receiving or have applied for unemployment benefits;
- Participating in drug or alcohol treatment program;
- Employed or self-employed for a minimum of 30 hours per week

Employable CalFresh General Relief recipients who are registered to participate in the CalFresh E&T program are scheduled to attend an orientation which delivers program rules and expectations. Once the orientation has been completed, the participant is given an appointment with an Employment Services worker, who performs a comprehensive assessment to determine the appropriate E&T component and services needed. The assessment includes occupational interests, vocational skills and aptitudes, educational attainment levels, English proficiency, basic literacy skills, prior work experience, barriers to employment, and need for support services.

The CalFresh E&T program currently provides job search and job readiness services, other work-related skills training, and supportive services to approximately 30 people per year, with a budget of \$270,000. After the assessment described above, participants are assigned to work activities, and are assisted in accessing supportive services to help in overcoming identified barriers to employment. CalFresh E&T participants are verbally referred to the AJCC for WIOA-funded job preparation/job search activities, workshops (resume writing, employment tips, managing money, interview skills, etc.), vocational training opportunities and job placement.

To meet CalFresh General Relief participants' needs, VCHSA offers transportation and vendor services. Transportation services are offered via bus passes (monthly pass) or bus tokens (daily pass). VCHSA has negotiated with local stores and schools to honor vendor claims for uniforms, tools, books, supplies, or testing fees. The ES worker addresses participants reimbursement on a case-by-case basis to ensure that they are reasonable, necessary, and directly related to participation in the E&T program. Current supportive services offerings are limited; the parties to this agreement are exploring ways to offer more generous supportive services where possible, which can mean the difference between success or failure for struggling participants.

The data suggests that significant numbers of CalFresh recipients are either unemployed or underemployed, and could benefit from job training or other workforce development services to obtain

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higher wages, particularly services that lead to employer-recognized certifications in in-demand occupations. WDBVC currently collaborates with the three colleges of the Ventura County Community College District, the Ventura County Adult Education Consortium, several area universities, labor unions and other education and training providers to advance career pathways programs that result in the attainment of industry-valued and recognized post-secondary credentials that are both portable and aligned with local and regional workforce needs.

The fact that 15,026 individuals, **slightly under 50% of all adults, have earned income yet still qualify for the CalFresh program** (which has an income test tied to the federal poverty level) suggests a combination of:

- Individuals receiving income at or near minimum wage
- Individuals working less than 40 hours per week
- One wage earner supporting many individuals

Data does not indicate how many individuals correspond to each of these categories, but with 15,026 people, it is likely that there are at least a few thousand in each group. Low-wage workers need opportunities to earn a family-sustaining wage; part-time workers who wish to work full time need assistance in doing so; comprehensive income-maximization efforts must be implemented across the board.

Since many CalFresh recipients already work, in low-wage or part-time jobs, there is also a need for workforce development services that can accommodate their schedules: evening training, 'night school,' weekend hours, on-line training, etc. (Many are currently working in retail, where shifts can change from week to week and where employers who are willing to support training by allowing workers to maintain a steady shift are rare.)

The data suggests there are many working families, including one-parent families, that are likely to need help with childcare. Half of the total CalFresh population is under the age of 18. More than 8,000 children (28% of total children) are of pre-school age (0-4). Nearly 20,000 (67% of total children) are of school age (5-15) and thus potentially in need of after-school care. There are nearly 7,000 single-parent CalFresh households. Childcare is an ongoing barrier for a significant portion of the population: waiting lists are lengthy, and people are often left to seek childcare on their own, through formal or informal arrangements.

Data indicates that 21% of the adult CalFresh population is 'elderly' (60+), a significant portion of whom may be outside the workforce, whether by choice or not. Approximately 15% of CalFresh households include someone with a disability; of those, some are working; others may be unemployed but interested in employment. More information is needed regarding the types of disabilities, the interest in employment, and the challenges faced in accessing jobs.

Equally important, particularly for those who do not currently have an income, is training that pays a wage of some kind, whether OJT or a training stipend. Earn and learn models are by definition more expensive than traditional training, which has implications regarding the numbers that can be served, but there is agreement among all stakeholders that we need to maximize such opportunities if we expect to reach low-income populations.

Financial empowerment and benefit maximization are strategies that the partners in this Local Plan Update intend to pursue in the interest of income mobility. The process of developing this document has helped us see that there are questions we should be asking of each enrollee in each of our



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respective programs. For example, intake at the AJCC should include a screening for any benefits an individual might be eligible for but not receiving. Low-income individuals who could be getting food assistance and are not should be advised on how to apply, and assisted with the application process.

The CalFresh application can be daunting for anyone not familiar with it, but in fact, for most applicants, the correct answer to many of the sometimes confusing questions is “Not Applicable.” The simple expedient of helping people apply for CalFresh would result in a significant increase in utilization – and since these are benefits to which people are entitled by virtue of income, there is no reason not to do so. The flip side of this coin, of course, is that everyone who applies for CalFresh should be provided with information about the workforce development services available at the AJCC, and encouraged to explore them.

Homelessness (along with near-homelessness) is a significant barrier for many CalFresh recipients. The emphasis on housing-first has at times had a deleterious impact on other strategies. However, even low-income housing requires an income, so strategies that combine housing and training are a real need.

CalFresh stakeholders and other partners identified a number of supportive services that might help CalFresh recipients be successful in workforce development programs and in obtaining family-sustaining employment:

- Low and/or no cost childcare for households with young children;
- More generous policies regarding items such as transportation, uniforms, books;
- Incentives (gift cards, training completion bonuses) have been effective in the past;
- Perhaps funding could be braided here, with one funder covering training costs, while another covers some or all of the supportive services costs;
- Healthcare services for temporarily disabled individuals.

Not a “supportive service” per se, but some evidence suggests that CalFresh recipients might do better in a cohort model, where participants can effectively function as a support group, as opposed to seeking training on their own through the standard Individual Training Account model.

CalFresh intake staff do not have the time to explore employment and training options with each client, nor can they be expected to have the expertise to do so effectively. As a result of the development of this plan update, the WDBVC has agreed to review existing marketing materials and produce a very simple, targeted one-sheet document for CalFresh staff to use with new enrollees, pointing them quickly and efficiently to the AJCC and the workforce system. Referral protocols are being developed which will make this process more seamless and less dependent on individual staff members expertise. At the same time, cross-training opportunities are being developed so that all CalFresh staff are aware of the workforce system, and AJCC staff understand CalFresh and the importance of income maximization.

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### ***Attachment 3: Child Support Services Partnership***

Local Department of Child Support Services leadership approached the WDBVC early in the plan update process and expressed a desire to play an active role. DCSS has worked hard to transition from a purely punitive approach to a model which supports noncustodial parents, including helping to connect them to employment-related services. Recognizing that there are limitations on what DCSS staff can do in this regard, the agency has worked to build bridges with the AJCC and the workforce system, and is ready to take this collaboration to a new level. DCSS participated in the meetings with CalFresh described above, as well as in the January evening meeting, and together with the WDBVC is working with community colleges, community-based organizations and other local service providers to identify ways to better serve the DCSS population.

As of January 2019, there were 17,621 non-custodial parents tracked by DCSS in Ventura County. English-speakers accounted for 13,324 (76%), with Spanish-speakers the second-largest population, at 2,467 (14%). More than more than half, however (51%) identify as Hispanic. A total of 1,232 (7%) identify as Black or African. Various Asian populations account for 363 individuals (2%), with Filipinos constituting the single largest group. While the population is overwhelmingly (89%) male, there are 1,782 female non-custodial parents. Well over half of the population (59%) is between the ages of 21 and 45. The single area of highest concentration is Oxnard, where 21% of participants reside.

Just under 40% of participating non-custodial parents do not show a current employer. Anecdotally, through conversations with either the custodial or the non-custodial parent, it is understood that a significant portion of that 40% is either self-employed or working under the table for cash. Just over 23% of the participating non-custodial parents have been incarcerated; of that subset, 58% do not show a current employer.

In the development of this plan update, Child Support Services, the WDBVC and partner agencies have identified the following types of services as being of particular need in order to help certain non-custodial parents meet their parental responsibilities: access to legal services and family law facilitators; parenting classes; assistance to improve credit scores and prioritize finances; housing; health insurance; expungement of criminal records. More specifically, if they are to be successful in the labor market, many non-custodial parents require adult education services, job training services, job placement and follow-up services, and the kinds of support services that can help people succeed in all of these, starting with transportation assistance.

At present, these services are not provided or available on a consistent, comprehensive manner. Individual staff work with individual clients to make the connection to the AJCC and workforce services, but it does not happen in a systematic or universal way. Developing this plan update together has allowed DCSS and the WDBVC to focus on the need for a more robust collaboration, to ensure that all non-custodial parents have access to workforce development services. Toward that end, staff from each agency will spend time offering services at the other's location, and will be trained in the services and opportunities each agency has to offer.

Barriers faced by significant numbers of non-custodial parents include lack of skills, gaps in work history, disabilities which make finding or holding employment difficult, criminal records, large debts, immigration status, license suspension, substance abuse or other mental health issues, homelessness and language barriers. For some non-custodial parents, these are augmented by a lack of motivation to earn reportable income due to wage garnishment.

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Efforts are currently made to address these barriers, but they are not adequate to meet the need. CSS provides participants with a detailed resource list, job postings, and referrals to the AJCC, the Family Law Facilitator, and legal services, among others.

In certain cases, it could be beneficial if the amount the participant owes can be temporarily reduced once the individual enrolls in on-the-job training or is placed in approved employment. This obviously has an impact on the custodial parent and the children, so it is a tool that must be used judiciously, but it could be the key to helping non-custodial parents get started on the road to fulfilling their parental responsibilities.

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**Attachment 4: Prison to Employment Regional Plan**

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