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Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2014



JLARC study calls state workforce programs fragmented, ineffective

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Posted: Monday, December 8, 2014 1:40 pm

By MICHAEL MARTZ Richmond Times-Dispatch

A new report gives Virginia's workforce training programs the business, calling them fragmented, ineffective and almost impossible to measure for results.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission [received a report from its staff](#) that recommends 30 changes in how Virginia runs workforce programs, which are spread among nine agencies that distribute more than \$340 million in federal and state funds for employee assistance and training.

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Members of the commission expressed dismay at findings that the state has done a poor job of defining performance measures for the program or even collecting information from the programs about how many people receive training for professions that need workers, much less what the state gets for the money it spends.

"No accountability — that's part of the problem," said Sen. John Watkins, R-Powhatan, the commission's chairman, after the presentation Monday.

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The administration of Gov. Terry McAuliffe embraced the JLARC findings and recommendations, with one exception, and made clear that it has begun collecting information that the previous administration under Gov. Bob McDonnell had not.

"This was not asked for before we came into office," Secretary of Commerce and Trade Maurice A. Jones said about data the state previously had not collected from local school divisions and community colleges on the number of people who are trained and credentialed in various professions.

The issue of workforce development is likely to be a major issue in the assembly session that convenes Jan. 14. McAuliffe will present budget proposals next week to cut \$322 million from the two-year budget to finish closing a \$2.4 billion revenue shortfall, but he said on Friday that he intends to seek more state money, not less, for workforce training and the state's economic development deal-closing fund.

"I do think this is the most important item we have to work on for the economic health and economic development of Virginia," Jones told the commission.

The administration said it differs from the JLARC staff on only one recommendation — where to consolidate a state apprenticeship program now administered by the Virginia Community College System and the Department of Labor and Industry.

The staff recommends giving the full responsibility to the community college system, which provides training across the state, while the administration wants to bring the program fully into the department, which Jones said is closer to the businesses that would employ apprentices.

Del. R. Steven Landes, R-Augusta, said the community colleges are far more visible and accessible than the department in his district in the Shenandoah Valley. The JLARC staff said the department is "less proactive" in promoting apprenticeships, which account for only 10 percent of the agency budget.

The report also found fault with the Virginia Employment Commission for having little or no presence in one-stop employment centers in some parts of the state, including the Richmond region, and recommended development of a plan to incorporate VEC offices into all workforce centers.

[The report](#) said responsibility for carrying out federal workforce laws is scattered among nine state agencies in three secretariats, and that the state board responsible for workforce development has neither the staff nor the authority to coordinate various programs at the state level.

The biggest concern documented by the report is the failure of workforce programs to produce employees with the skills for the professions that need them, such as health services, or business needs specific to different regions of the state. The fault lies in part with local school systems in developing curricula for career and technical education that doesn't match the needs of businesses looking for employees in their regions, the report concludes.

"Workforce development programs do not appear to meet the expectations of many employers with respect to producing the workforce they need and providing the services they value," states the report, which said only 16 percent of employers



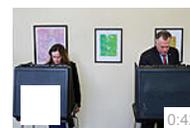
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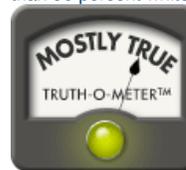
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surveyed for the study sought help from public workforce programs when they had difficulty in filling positions.

For example, the report said, health sciences account for 18 percent of job openings but only 3 percent of high school career and technical education programs. At the same time, 20 percent of the high school courses focus on arts, communications and human services, which account for 5 percent of job openings.

Members of the commission made clear they expect the programs to develop performance measures to judge the return on the state's financial investment, which is about one-third of all money spent on the programs. "We're allocating capital here; what kind of return are we getting on it?" asked Del. Jimmie Massie, R-Henrico.

Jones said his office will work with the Virginia Employment Commission and community college system to produce a plan that emphasizes professional credentials, jobs, wages, return on investment of state funds and business involvement.

"Businesses need to be front and center," he said.

[PDF: JLARC report — Virginia's Workforce Development Programs](#)

mmartz@timesdispatch.com

(804) 649-6964



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RTD political reporter and columnist, **Jeff Schapiro** has covered Virginia elections and the state Capitol for 30 years. Read his [column](#) and follow him on [Twitter](#).

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