



The Republican.

State grants \$1.3 million in job skills aid for Springfield's comprehensive workforce development plan

Tuesday, August 19, 2008

By **PETER GOONAN**
pgoonan@repub.com

SPRINGFIELD - As part of an ongoing commitment to help revitalize Springfield, the state has announced nearly \$1.3 million in grants to aid the city's new comprehensive workforce development plan.

State Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development Suzanne M. Bump announced the funds and the administration's support for Springfield's workforce development plan during a press conference Monday at City Hall.

The plan, as created by the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County in conjunction with the city and state, is "ambitious and inspiring," Bump said.

The grants will target workforce needs ranging from increased efforts to promote early childhood education and literacy to providing training in high growth and high demand occupations such as health care and precision manufacturing, Bump and local officials said. Bump was joined by Mayor Domenic J. Sarno and many local workforce leaders in announcing the plans and funding.

The grants include \$475,000 to the Regional Employment Board that in part will help promote early childhood education training and certification, and increase technical training and adult literacy efforts.

An additional \$475,000 was granted to Baystate Medical Center and Mercy Medical Center to finance the recruitment and training of 55 acute-care certified nursing assistants and 10 other workers. The effort is intended to address shortages in skilled acute care areas and to provide career opportunities, particularly in low-income areas of Springfield and Holyoke, officials said.

Michael D. Niziolek, chairman of the Regional Employment Board, said the four strategic goals of the local workforce development plan are:

Establish a universal pre-kindergarten program.

Improve education proficiency and career awareness among the youth including its recommendation that "extended learning time" be implemented in at least two middle schools.

Increase adult literacy education services.

Target training and education toward filling jobs in key industries.

Bump praised the employment board and city for developing a blueprint "which takes a strategic cradle to career approach in educating and training its workforce for the jobs of the future."

Every dollar invested in universal pre-kindergarten "comes back to us in the form of children ready to learn and be prepared" through the school years to become a more productive workforce, Bump said.

As part of the effort toward education proficiency, Big Y, MassMutual Financial Group and Western Massachusetts Electric Co. have jointly contributed \$150,000 to provide paid internships, year-round career education and mentoring to 50 disadvantaged students, Niziolek said.

The employment board's plan is "fundamentally driven by the workforce needs of the business community," Niziolek said.

"What makes this plan unique is that it focuses on both short- and long-term strategies that must be implemented in our region if we are to have a competitive workforce," Niziolek said.

The city is contributing \$100,000 in community development block grant funds for adult basic education, Sarno said.

The workforce plan is an "aggressive plan with measurable outcomes," Sarno said.

"This large-scale project is important not only for Springfield, but also for the commonwealth because as the saying goes, 'as goes Springfield, so goes the region,'" Sarno stated in a prepared release.

©2008 The Republican

© 2008 MassLive.com All Rights Reserved.