

1                   **STATEWIDE SKILLS ENHANCEMENT FOR DISLOCATED WORKERS**  
2   **DISCUSSION PAPER**

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4   **Background**

5   On March 13, 2020, President Trump declared the COVID-19 pandemic a national emergency.  
6   That same day, with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in multiple Texas counties, Governor Greg  
7   Abbott declared a state of disaster for Texas.

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9   On March 19, 2020, Governor Abbott issued GA-08, prompting many local governments across  
10   the state to order social distancing requirements and the closure of all non-essential businesses.  
11   As a result, more than 2.7 million Texans have filed unemployment insurance claims, far  
12   exceeding the 750,000 total claims filed in 2019.

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14   **Issue 1: Statewide Skills Enhancement for Dislocated Workers**

15   The state has seen an unprecedented number of layoffs as a result of the COVID-19 disaster;  
16   therefore, there is an unprecedented need for activities that will enhance the skills of unemployed  
17   Texans. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) §134(a)(3)(A) and 20 CFR  
18   §682.210 gives states broad flexibility in using funds reserved under WIOA §133(a) to develop  
19   and implement innovative programs and strategies for meeting the needs of employers and job  
20   seekers in the state.

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22   On April 14, 2020, TWC’s three-member Commission voted to redirect more than \$12.8 million  
23   in statewide WIOA funding and award these funds to Boards to provide services and training to  
24   Texans impacted by the pandemic. Though several Local Workforce Development Boards have  
25   applied for and been approved for a portion of this funding, a balance of approximately \$5.8  
26   million remains 45 days after being made available. On June 2, 2020, TWC’s three-member  
27   Commission directed staff to use the remaining balance for a statewide initiative to enhance the  
28   skills of unemployed Texans.

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30   In order to use the remaining funds most effectively to address the increased statewide demand  
31   for skills enhancement, TWC will contract with two Massive Open Online Course providers at  
32   the state level to provide skills enhancement opportunities to dislocated workers in Texas.

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34   **Issue 2: Substantial Layoffs**

35   WIOA §3(15) sets forth the definition of dislocated worker and the criteria for determining  
36   eligibility for dislocated workers to receive WIOA-funded services. Included in this definition  
37   are individuals who have been “terminated or laid off (including receipt of such notice) from  
38   employment as a result of a permanent or substantial layoff.”

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40   “Substantial layoff” is not currently defined by existing legislation or regulation. The social  
41   distancing requirements and closure of all non-essential businesses due to the COVID-19  
42   pandemic resulted in a loss of employment for millions of Texans and significantly decreased  
43   opportunities for reemployment even for those individuals who lost their jobs before the  
44   pandemic began.

1 Establishing a definition of “substantial layoff” that includes all individuals receiving UI benefits  
2 during the COVID-19 pandemic would ensure that all UI claimants can receive WIOA-funded  
3 services, including the Statewide Skills Enhancement for Dislocated Workers initiative included  
4 in Issue 1 of this discussion paper.  
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6 **Decision Points**

7 Staff seeks direction on the approval of up to \$5.8 million in WIOA statewide funds reserved  
8 under WIOA §133(a) to contract with up to two vendors for a Statewide Skills Enhancement for  
9 Dislocated Workers initiative to provide rapid skills enhancement to dislocated workers in  
10 Texas.

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12 Additionally, staff seeks direction on defining “substantial layoff” to include all individuals  
13 receiving UI benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic.  
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