



Local Workforce Priorities for CareerSource Hillsborough Pinellas

2025 Legislative Session Brief

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REGION 28
SERVING HILLSBOROUGH AND PINELLAS COUNTIES,
FLORIDA



Legislative Priorities for CareerSource Hillsborough Pinellas

Dear Legislators,

I am honored to introduce myself as the new Chief Executive Officer of CareerSource Hillsborough Pinellas (CSHP), effective January 9, 2025. I am thrilled to begin this role during a pivotal time for workforce development in Florida and across the nation. CSHP represents the newly merged CareerSource Tampa Bay and CareerSource Pinellas organizations, now serving a dynamic population of nearly 2.5 million residents across Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties.

CSHP's mission is clear: to connect talent with opportunity, support businesses, and empower job seekers by reducing welfare dependency, fostering self-sufficiency, and boosting local economic competitiveness. As we approach the 2025 Legislative Session and the start of a new Congress, I am eager to partner with you to address the critical workforce challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Key Priorities for the 2025 Legislative Session and Congress

Veterans Services

Florida has one of the nation's largest veteran populations, with Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties home to over 175,000 veterans. CSHP is committed to providing comprehensive career services to veterans, transitioning service members, and their families, including:

- Expansion of earn-and-learn programs like our Apprenticeships to Careers (ACE) Program to help veterans develop in-demand skills while easing the transition to civilian life.
- Prioritized services for subgroups with barriers to employment, such as disabled and homeless veterans, who may have limited access to traditional workforce funding.

Opportunity Youth

Nearly 27,000 youth in Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties are disconnected from school and work, representing a critical need for targeted programs. CSHP is leading innovative solutions, including:

- Tampa Bay Summer Hires (TBSH) and Summer PAYS Programs: Providing paid work experience, career exploration, and leadership training for low-income youth.
- Research initiatives and workforce summits to better understand and address systemic barriers facing opportunity youth.

Reductions in WIOA funding by an anticipated 30% threaten our ability to serve this vulnerable population. I urge you to prioritize funding to ensure youth job programs remain a pathway to economic success and self-sufficiency.

Justice-Involved Workforce Initiatives

Reentry employment programs are essential to reducing recidivism and supporting economic stability. CSHP has implemented targeted initiatives, including:

- CARES Program: Offering comprehensive reentry support for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Partnerships with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice to deliver career success workshops for justice-involved youth.

Continued investment in these programs will enhance public safety and create meaningful second chances for those reintegrating into our communities.

CSHP's Vision for 2025 and Beyond

The merger of CareerSource Tampa Bay and CareerSource Pinellas into CSHP is an opportunity to streamline operations, reduce costs, and expand partnerships to serve our region more efficiently. Under my leadership, CSHP will:

- Prioritize **workforce equity** and opportunities for underserved populations, including veterans, justice-involved individuals, opportunity youth, and workers with disabilities.
- Expand **career pathways** through innovative collaborations with the education sector and local industries.
- Strengthen **disaster recovery** workforce programs to support communities and businesses in times of crisis.

We are also proud to support initiatives such as the **Hope Florida Program**, which connects individuals to training and employment resources to promote self-sufficiency. This collaborative model reflects the community-driven solutions CSHP is committed to fostering.

Partnering for Success

As we navigate a dynamic economic landscape, CSHP is dedicated to aligning workforce strategies with the needs of Florida's residents and employers. I look forward to working closely with you to ensure our region has the resources and flexibility to build a stronger, more resilient workforce.

Thank you for your continued leadership and partnership. Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss how we can collaborate to achieve shared goals for Florida's workforce and economy.

Sincerely,

Keidrian Kunkel

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CareerSource Hillsborough Pinellas
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2025 Legislative Priorities

VETERANS SERVICES

Recognized as one of the most veteran-friendly states in the nation, Florida holds the country's third highest veteran population with nearly 1.5 million and the second largest population of women veterans (168,000).[i] In 2023, Hillsborough and Pinellas County had the highest concentration of veterans in the state with nearly 175,000, accounting for 12% of the state's veteran population.[ii] Furthermore, Hillsborough County is home to MacDill Air Force Base, which supports an estimated military and veteran population of 95,000 joint service active duty, joint service civilians, family members, and retirees.

In accordance with the Jobs for Veterans Act, veterans and eligible spouses receive priority of service. CSHP supports the veteran community through targeted training and employment programs and veteran ecosystem development activities to streamline access to services among multiple programs and providers. CSHP's dedicated staff provide personalized career services to veterans, transitioning service members, and eligible spouses, including job referral and matching services, job development, job training, and career management. Additional resources include referrals to social assistance and family support programs and specialized programs tailored to the individual's phase of military service.

CSHP is actively seeking funding opportunities to improve training programs for veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses, such as the expansion of our highly successful Apprenticeships to Careers (ACE) Program. These programs provide earn-and-learn models for high-demand jobs, supporting skill development and easing the transition to civilian life. Training programs are combined with work-based learning, such as paid work experience, on-the-job training, and apprenticeship opportunities with local employers, with the goal of long-term, sustainable employment. Expanded supportive services and specialized employability services provide additional evidence-based resources to increase economic self-sufficiency of veterans and their families while meeting the needs of employers and enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of the regional economy. **This additional funding is necessary to meet the unique needs of the military community, with a focus on offering comprehensive supportive services to subgroups with barriers to employment such as homeless, disabled and women veterans, that may have limited access to traditional funding from programs like the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).**

REQUEST

Funding Requested: \$1,500,000 to fund participant wages during their work-based learning experience; expanded supportive services to address barriers to employment, such as childcare stipends, transportation assistance, and referrals to substance abuse and mental health services that will enable participants to fully participate in the program and support in their transition to employment; training and education services; certification costs; and management and general costs to support the program. CSHP would provide a minimum of \$184,000 in matching funds to operate the program.

Target Population: Veterans, transitioning service members and eligible spouses, with an emphasis on individuals with significant barriers to employment and subpopulations, such as disabled, homeless and women veterans.

Number of Veterans Impacted: 110 individuals, with expected sustainability of the program through integration with existing and planned veteran services initiatives.

[i] Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs. (2023). Our Veterans. Retrieved from Florida Department of Veterans Affairs: <https://www.floridavets.org/our-veterans/>

[ii] Florida Legislature, Office of Economic and Demographic Research. (2024, January). Hillsborough County and Pinellas County Area Profiles. Retrieved from Florida Legislature, Office of Economic and Demographic Research: <http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/area-profiles/county/hillsborough.pdf>; <http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/area-profiles/county/pinellas.pdf>

WORKFORCE BOARD CONSOLIDATION

Effective July 1, 2024, CareerSource Tampa Bay and CareerSource Pinellas have merged into one local workforce development board as directed by the [2021 Reimagining Education and Career Help \(REACH\) Act](#) and the [Florida Workforce System Transformation Plan](#), which seeks to improve access to good jobs and career pathways to economic opportunity for Floridians through a series of initiatives that improve alignment, consistency and outcomes.

This merger presents CSHP with exciting opportunities, including reducing administrative costs, broadening our partnership network, and pursuing grants with our expanded geographic region and population. With this expanded reach, we look forward to delivering even greater value and improved customer service to job seekers and employers, while also serving our communities more efficiently and effectively.

DISPLACED WORKERS: HURRICANES HELENE AND MILTON RECOVERY EFFORTS

In the wake of back-to-back hurricanes hitting the gulf coast during a two-week period, CSHP staff has provided support and services to thousands of job seekers and employers. Services to assist with storm recovery employment and business reopening were provided online and in-person at various locations via the Disaster Recovery Centers in partnership with FEMA, Florida Commerce, and the Small Business Administration.

- CSHP held Disaster and Veterans Resource and Career Fairs, featuring 50 employers and more than 200 attendees.
- **CSHP staff have served over 5,800 unique individuals and facilitated over 9,000 visits to our centers, an 87% increase in a one month period from 10/16/24 – 11/16/24.**
- CSHP staff have conducted outreach to more than 1,600 affected businesses in the region.
- CSHP is currently conducting outreach across the region to connect with businesses in need of temporary workers for Disaster Recovery assistance.



WORKFORCE STRATEGIES

Key strategies are being implemented with a focus on the following:

Opportunity Youth

There are approximately 27,305 opportunity youth who are disconnected from work and school in Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties, accounting for nearly 11% of all 16–24-year-olds in the region. Youth disconnection is not evenly distributed, with the highest rates concentrated in underserved communities.

Youth employment programs offered by CSHP, such as Tampa Bay Summer Hires (TBSH) and Summer PAYS, give low-income and disadvantaged youth essential opportunities for future success in the job market. First-time youth employment programs such as those offered by CSHP create pathways to economic success, aiding young adults to overcome barriers to employment, develop workforce readiness skills and connect them with the opportunity to overcome systemic barriers to attain long-term, sustainable employment and economic self-sufficiency.



CSHP anticipates that WIOA funding will be reduced by 30% compared to previous years, even though the needs of opportunity youth are on the rise. To mitigate this decrease in funding, CSHP pursues grants to support training programs that are essential to offer low-income and disadvantaged youth aged 16-24 vital opportunities for career exploration, leadership training, and paid work experience.

CSHP is dedicated to advancing research and implementing effective strategies to link these young individuals to employment opportunities. Additionally, we aim to assist community leaders in gaining a deeper understanding of these youth, their narratives, as well as ideas and solutions to support young adults in transitioning into the workforce in the greater Tampa Bay area.

Good Jobs & Equity

CSHP conducted a research pilot focused on integrating federal Good Jobs Principles into our workforce strategies, establishing a sustainable process within our system without incurring additional costs or requiring extra funding. This initiative involved educating both employers and job seekers on the benefits of adopting good job characteristics, which enhance worker security and stability while giving employers a competitive advantage in recruitment, retention, and profitability.

Aligning with the U.S. Department of Labor directive, CSHP was selected to participate in the Good Jobs Fellowship initiated by Results for America, benefiting from collaboration with leaders involved in this new initiative across the United States.

CSHP's Good Jobs strategy emphasizes the importance of identifying and fostering long-term partnerships with employers to create strategic and flexible career pathways that lead to quality jobs while addressing the specific needs of the local labor market.

CSHP has developed a Good Jobs Framework designed to ensure equitable access to workforce services and employment for individuals from underserved and underrepresented communities in the post-COVID-19 economy. Our bi-monthly workshops for local job seekers provide innovative approaches to job searching and employer engagement through the lens of Good Jobs.

WORKFORCE STRATEGIES

Non-Traditional/Diverse Populations

To address the challenges of a limited job seeker pool caused by low unemployment rates, CSHP is focusing our outreach and recruitment efforts on nontraditional and diverse populations, aiming to create a more inclusive workforce.

The primary populations are:

- **Re-Entry/Returning Citizens/Justice-Involved Individuals**
- **Opportunity Youth**
- **Veterans**
- **Disabled Workers**
- **Individuals in Recovery**

Efforts are in progress to establish ecosystems in each of these domains to assist job seekers and reduce obstacles to accessing postsecondary education, securing employment, and achieving financial sustainability.

Career Pathways and Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)

CSHP is collaborating with the education sector to develop career pathways that align with industry priorities. **This initiative places a greater emphasis on making credit for prior learning accessible to job seekers, allowing for the recognition of college-level skills gained outside the conventional classroom setting.** This includes the development of a CPL Network / Education and Industry Consortium to create solutions and share successful strategies among practitioners.

Improving Access to Workforce Services

Strategies involve expanding virtual access to resources presently offered at the one-stop centers, enhancing our partner network to incorporate resources that CSHP does not currently provide, and broadening our presence within the community as well as in geographic areas that currently lack workforce resources.



ADDITIONAL UPDATES

HOPE FLORIDA INITIATIVE

Launched by Florida First Lady Casey DeSantis and initiated by the Florida Department of Children and Families, the Hope Florida program supports individuals with critical needs, connecting them with resources and enhancing community connection among various partner agencies and nonprofits. **Hope Navigators are stationed at each local workforce development board, where they work directly with participants to help them secure jobs, enroll in training programs, and establish new career paths that promote self-sufficiency and economic success.**

In the program's first year:

- Four individuals enrolled in training funded by Hope Florida.
- Thirty individuals received tailored services from the CSHP Hope Navigators.
- Regular networking groups were organized to facilitate collaboration among key stakeholders.
- Efforts to expand employer outreach were made to connect participants to job opportunities.

WIOA REAUTHORIZATION

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) expired in fiscal year 2020, leaving workforce agencies in a precarious position, dependent on annual appropriations bills for funding. Over the past two decades, federal funding for workforce programs has decreased by 45%, and without timely updates, workforce systems are struggling to tackle today's economic and employment challenges. **Reauthorizing WIOA would secure vital funding for the workforce development system, ensuring that more workers, especially those from historically underrepresented communities, can access quality workforce development opportunities.**

After months of negotiations, a bipartisan consensus for reauthorizing WIOA was achieved when the US House of Representatives passed HR 6655, the Stronger Workforce for America Act. This was later included in the original text of a continuing resolution, finalized as H.R. 10545, the American Relief Act. The final passage of the American Relief Act did not encompass WIOA Reauthorization, which will now be addressed by the incoming 119th United States Congress.

CSHP is dedicated to collaborating with legislators to ensure that this essential program is reauthorized, strengthening the workforce and empowering communities to meet ongoing labor market demands.



CareerSource

HILLSBOROUGH PINELLAS

CareerSource Hillsborough Pinellas proudly serves the job seekers and businesses in Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties.

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