

a. The local area has adjusted or provided an addendum to the local plan explaining the planned use of the waiver.

The local plan for Western Arkansas has been drafted to allow flexibility to program initiatives and to adapt best practices when options are presented. The local area will add this addendum to the local plan to further illustrate the intent of the area to provide the most appropriate service delivery to meet the needs of business and job seekers in the Western Arkansas region.

b. The waiver request includes a description of the barriers to optimum service to area youth caused by the 75% restriction.

The Western Arkansas workforce development area has a significant challenge related to youth and their preparedness to enter the job market. Many youth are lacking skills necessary to meet demand occupation openings and are unsure where to go to prepare for a career once they leave school and no longer have the support of the regular education system. We know there are a number of barriers that attribute to this including foster care, homelessness, justice involvement, isolation due to the rural nature of the region, and a lack of job knowledge and work skills training.

Arkansas is predominantly a rural state, and the Western Arkansas region reflects that. This creates many barriers such as transportation, available childcare, food insecurity, accessible training, or even knowledge of local job opportunities. Youth poverty rates are evidence of the need for aid to connect youth to opportunity before they leave school unprepared for the workplace. The poverty rates of persons under 18 in the six counties making up Western Arkansas are as follows: Crawford 28.1%, Franklin 23.2%, Logan 22.2%, Polk 28.9%, Scott 29.8%, and Sebastian 21.7%. These rates are 5.8% to 10.2% higher than the total poverty rate of the area.

In this region we have the highest population of youth in foster care in the state illustrated in the 2019 Statistical Report from Arkansas Department of Human Services. Pulled from information provided by the Division of Children and Family Services, the report stated that our service area represented a total of 1,320 children with 834 of those residing within Sebastian County. DCFS has ten foster care service areas throughout the state, and the Western Arkansas region represents over 17% of the children served. Homelessness is also a concern brought on by a lack of preparedness for the job market or inability to maintain sustainable employment. According to adedata.arkansas.gov, "Homeless by Type" there are nearly 1040 youth homeless in this region. As youth age out of foster care they face a real possibility of becoming part of this statistic according to representatives of a local youth crisis center.

c. The waiver request describes how the waiver will increase the number of in-school youth serviced and the overall performance indicators.

A key focus of our efforts in developing opportunities with youth is to provide quality work experience to young people while in high school. Most schools do not

have the programing or business outreach personnel to connect students to work experience in areas they may have interest in. This disconnect may be due to distance to work sites, a lack of matching services or counseling to connect business owners to interested students, or the lack of sufficient, properly trained professionals to provide case management and coaching to youth to help them succeed in pursuing a career in a demand field.

The region hosts one of the civilian conservation centers that serve youth at Cass. The Cass Job Corps center is a partner in the region's workforce delivery system providing training to youth in a number of demand trades but has opportunities to work with other agencies to connect their youth to businesses willing to provide work experiences. The center has an average of 100 youth in the program year-round.

d. The waiver request details how services to area youth will improve because of the waiver. e. The waiver request describes how required performance indicators will increase as a result of the waiver.

The system of Western Arkansas has taken the approach that quality work experience and supportive case management will improve the successful and sustainable employment of youth in the region. The local area also has success stories illustrating work experience can support high school completion of at-risk youth further reinforcing the need for the variance allowing Western Arkansas to utilize youth funds in support of a higher percentage of in-school youth. It is our hope that by assisting youth that can be reached this way more out of school youth will also learn and participate in our programs. This approach will increase the work experience usage percentage providing greater immersion in actual work activities and connecting youth to mentors on the job sites. As stated, high school completion by at-risk youth can be reinforced through positive adult interactions. It is also anticipated that this will create more sustainable employment of youth entering the workforce through job preparedness and experience.

f. The waiver request specifies the requested minimum rate of Youth funds to be spent for services to OSY for PY19 and PY20 funds.

This is a request for utilization of the variance granted to the state of Arkansas related to the expenditure of funds on in-school verses out-of-school youth for the PY20 funding cycle. The Western Arkansas workforce development area expects that the use of 40% of our allocation to in-school youth support will create positive outcomes in high school completion by at-risk youth, better job retention, and improved knowledge of skills and traits needed to obtain and fill demand job opportunities in the region. This variance will also allow business outreach efforts to provide fresh pathways for local companies to fill positions now and in the future as the outreach team helps them establish positive relationships with area schools and vis a versa.