



A Message from Troilen Seward

Teamwork Did It!

If anyone needs a lesson in teamwork, VAACE can provide it! When Secretary Slater gave his presentation to Senate Finance in November at Longwood University, I started worrying. It was in that presentation that we learned Adult Education was going to be moved from the Department of Education to the Community College System. Having experienced a similar scenario back in 2006, worry quickly turned into a nightmare. This was a more challenging situation since the details were in a Governor's bill that had been carefully planned. HB 2195 and SB 1470 began as a thirty-seven page, complex bill that created a new agency, the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement. This new department lies within the executive branch and will be headed by the Director of Workforce Development and Advancement who shall be appointed by the Governor.

As you are aware, workforce development across the Commonwealth is spread across many agencies, but there is no one agency where it is centered. This fragmented, decentralized approach prevents efficient coordination and administration. This initiative changes that. While the plan provides a great opportunity for positive results in the workforce, the moving of Adult Education was not a good fit. Our focus is working with the 92% of enrolled adult students who function below the 9th grade level or who are English language learners. These students are functionally illiterate in the workplace. Our mission is to prepare these learners to experience success once they can read and communicate. Only about 10% of our students are involved in workforce training. If we had staff to work with our completers to assist them with getting into further training programs, adult education students would increase the trained workforce. While the community college provides many programs, there are many other opportunities that do not require a full two-year commitment. The bill, for example, thoroughly addresses apprenticeships that provide training.

How did we succeed in being removed from the bills? It was a long and laborious effort. Before Christmas, Secretary Slater had received a letter from VAACE explaining why Adult Education belonged in the Department of Education. I always hesitate to mention names for fear of leaving out someone, but this letter was collaboratively drafted by Rebecca Scott, Kathy Anderson and Troilen Seward. Your VAACE President, Rachel Ambrose approved it and sent it on to the Secretary. Rachel subsequently invited Secretary Slater and staff to attend a session with VAACE Board members and Program Managers. This was a great opportunity for dialogue. VAACE members asked many questions. After the session ended, there was a great deal of discussion about what VAACE needed to do. Those present were shown how to follow legislation, how to find who was on the



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committees where the legislation had been assigned, how to find out who their legislators are and how to reach them. It was reiterated that everyone must be in touch with his/her legislators. And you were! I could not count the messages that came through my phone in a day's time. You also communicated with each other, and I often saw something that gave me a new tidbit to follow. The communication with each other and with the legislators was invaluable. As you have heard many times, we have nothing to give except our vote!

While you were all busy throughout the session, I was on site every day working with necessary folks and in Commerce and Energy and General Laws Committees. I spoke in Commerce and Energy and asked that we be removed from the bill. I sent a memo to every member of General Laws. (That makes it sound too simple. There were many more contacts!) By the time the House bill came over to General Laws, our request had been granted. There were several printings of the bill as there were many significant changes. As of this writing, the bill now numbers twenty-five pages. The only mention of us is the required MOU with your WIOA Board.

I know many people think legislators do what they want to do and do not pay attention to anything people say. I had only a very few VAACE members say that they never received an acknowledgement from legislators they contacted. I must say that Secretary Slater and his staff were very responsive. I have never worked with such a complex bill and had such a prompt and positive response at the executive level.

A LOUD SHOUT OUT to Stacy Wright who worked every day during session and even took my calls on weekends. Your Legislative Chair played a huge role in your success. I am sure when she agreed to be the committee chair, she had no idea what she was going to have to do. We should all be glad she was there! And a thank you to everyone who supported the effort to keep Adult Education with the Department of Education. Without everyone advocating our position as you did, we would not have been successful.