



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

# *Milwaukee County*

CHRIS ABELE • COUNTY EXECUTIVE

April 28, 2017

Dear Governor Walker,

As you know, I share your commitment to economic growth and development for our state. While there may be different perspectives on the best approach to meet these goals, everyone agrees that connecting people to jobs is at the foundation. Milwaukee County is in the best position to succeed in building this foundation, which is why I am requesting that you return the designation of Milwaukee County as a local workforce investment area and the County Executive as the Chief Elected Official. I come to this conclusion based on a few observations, as described below.

Returning the designation to the County is in line with national best practice – to administer workforce services at a more regional level. Workforce must occur on a regional level due to the mismatch between the location of workers and the location of jobs. An example where we've found success in these efforts lies with the Milwaukee County Transit System's JobLines routes that connect about 1,000 Milwaukee workers with 150 employers in Waukesha and Washington counties every day. Waukesha County Executive Paul Farrow has been a strong supporter of our efforts, which provide a mutual benefit. We all must think and act bigger than just our own localities if we are to succeed.

Milwaukee County interacts directly with the workforce through its services – from the House of Correction to child support services to disability services to housing services. Furthermore, we provide a natural link between the workforce and jobs through our mass transit system. Because of Milwaukee County's history of working with these populations, which have a high degree of overlap with the unemployed population, we understand their needs and how to customize services to address each population's unique challenges to entering the workforce.

Milwaukee County, with its emphasis on economic development, has collaborative partnerships with adjoining counties, who account for a large portion of available jobs, as well as regional business partners who express to us their workforce needs. We already regularly and successfully work with these entities on issues of shared interest, like public safety communications and transit, and want to see Milwaukee County employers and workers share in the economic opportunity as well.

For years, we have been a regular partner of Employ Milwaukee and believe they do good work. In the past year, we've developed an even deeper partnership with Employ Milwaukee. For example, Opportunity Knocks, which launched in fall of 2016, is a novel housing model that utilizes home equity created through home renovation to fund reentry services and first-time home ownership. Opportunity Knocks takes tax-foreclosed homes in Milwaukee County suburban municipalities, renovates the homes while providing job training to nonviolent House of Correction (HOC) offenders, provides reentry services to the offenders after the renovation, and sells the house to a first-time homeowner through the County's new Section 8 Homeownership Program paired with HOME funds for down payment assistance. Employ Milwaukee has been a crucial partner in this initiative.

We've also partnered with Employ Milwaukee on UpLift MKE, a unique job training and placement program that is empowering workers with the skills they need. Built on a pay for performance model, this effort has already placed more than 100 individuals in jobs averaging more than \$15 per hour. These job training and placement efforts are targeted directly to workers, particularly those in and near the Sherman Park area, who most need support to successfully climb the ladder of opportunity.

UpLift MKE been so successful that we expanded it less than a year in, adding \$500,000 in funding for UpLift MKE and \$165,000 for the Boys and Girls Club of Milwaukee to add a Youth Career Development project manager to serve teenagers in Sherman Park and other areas. In 2015, more than 300 teenagers found employment through the efforts of the Boys and Girls Club, and this funding will expand their reach.

The main reason to bring the County and Employ Milwaukee together is to create a more natural and seamless opportunity to work together on these initiatives and others, which I believe will exponentially increase our success rates, and therefore, our ability to empower more people. This level of coordination is not just desirable, it is a requirement of the Workforce Investment Act as it explicitly states that local entities must coordinate with supportive services, like transit and wraparound care.

We will continue to work closely with the City of Milwaukee and the efforts they have spearheaded, such as the Mayor's Earn and Learn program. I look forward to working with you to plan and implement a seamless transition that will ensure and grow the continued success of Employ Milwaukee's efforts.

Sincerely,



Chris Abele  
County Executive

Cc: Ray Allen