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DWD Secretary Newson Meets with U.S. Dept. of Labor Officials, Seeks Funds, Flexibility to Address Black Male Unemployment

WASHINGTON, D.C. – During meetings today with key U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) officials, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Reggie Newson called for increased collaboration between the federal government and state of Wisconsin to connect working-age black males with manufacturing skills training and access to employment opportunities in southeastern Wisconsin and beyond.

“Today we sent a powerful message to Washington, D.C., that the Walker Administration stands ready to help minority populations – including black males in the Milwaukee metro area – get into good-paying jobs,” Secretary Newson said. “We are urging our federal workforce partners to stand with us at the DWD and collaborate with us on programs and services that will move the state of Wisconsin in this direction.”

Secretary Newson met today with DOL officials including Dr. William E. Spriggs, Assistant Secretary for Policy; Gregg Weltz, Chief of the Division of Youth Services in the Employment and Training Administration; and Carrianna Suiter, Legislative Officer in the DOL’s Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs. Secretary Newson shared details of Wisconsin’s ongoing efforts to connect all job seekers to jobs, including specifics of Governor Walker’s Wisconsin Working plan. Secretary Newson reinforced his message during meetings with Wisconsin’s Congressional Delegation as well.

As part of the discussion, Secretary Newson advocated for additional federal funding, as well as greater flexibility with existing dollars, to focus on reducing unemployment among minority populations in southeastern and south-central Wisconsin, including black males in the Milwaukee area. Secretary Newson cited as an example the recent study by Dr. Marc Levine of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee that indicates only 44.7 percent of metro Milwaukee’s working-age black males between the ages of 16 and 64 were employed in 2010.

“The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development will push for all available resources and tools to get job seekers trained and into good-paying jobs like advanced manufacturing,” Secretary Newson said. “On behalf of Governor Walker, we are also committed to pursuing solutions to disparities that exist in southeastern and south-central Wisconsin, including the unacceptably high unemployment rate among black males in metro Milwaukee.”

Secretary Newson said DWD will continue its dialogue with DOL officials and pursue opportunities including federal grants and other potential funding sources, even as the agency works with partners at the local, regional and state levels to advance effective workforce strategies with existing federal and state funding.