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Contact: Matthew James (757) 826-3327

Local Agencies Merge to Refocus on Economic Challenges *Leveraging resources & staff maximizes Peninsula's economic competitiveness*

Newport News, VA - - Separate funding streams, turf issues and political agendas are all among the many reasons why many agencies prefer to remain autonomous in advancing their organizations' missions. But, none of these reasons stopped the Peninsula Council for Workforce Development (PCFWD) in its recent decision to merge similar-focused organizations, to solve challenges around the region's workforce issues. The PCFWD realigned with the Greater Peninsula Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and the Greater Peninsula Workforce Development Consortium (Consortium), by creating one consolidated governance structure, with each of these organizations playing an integral role in building an effective workforce development system for the Greater Peninsula Region.

President and CEO Matthew James, PCFWD, said, "You can't have a unified system, when multiple agencies have similar missions and are not looking strategically at ways to leverage funding streams and resources to better meet our economic demands. There are too many issues facing the Peninsula in these economic downturns that require a strategic, coordinated response to these challenges."

According to the latest available data (March 2009), the Virginia Employment Commission reports that the Greater Peninsula region of Virginia (which includes the cities of Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson and Williamsburg and the counties of Gloucester, James City and York) faced an overall unemployment rate of 7.4%, up 3.6% since March of last year.

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While the three agencies have been working loosely together to address these challenges, a more formal realignment with unified staff organizations has been completed. The PCFWD now consists of two divisions (federal and non-federal) to increase its effectiveness and efficiency in providing workforce development programs for individuals, localities, employers and community partners on the Peninsula. The federal division oversees all federally-funded initiatives and provides program oversight and operations for the Peninsula Worklink Career Centers, which serves the citizens with employment and training services. The federal division also leads youth programs and special grants. Executive Vice President & COO Bill Mann, PCFWD, said, “Federal funding is an important component in workforce development. It is the funding stream that allows us to provide employment and training services through our many community partners to our citizens.”

The non-federal division of the PCFWD oversees the employer-led efforts to include the industry cluster initiatives, special projects, investor relationships and education initiatives, such as the Youth Career Cafes.

HR Director of W.M. Jordan, Sybil Wheatley, serves as the chair of the PCFWD and comments, “The merger of all of our workforce agencies is imperative to this region’s success. It provides a unified vision and message to the community about workforce development initiatives on the Peninsula, reduces and eliminates redundancies in the workforce development delivery system, and enhances the system’s ability to focus on broader workforce development issues. Overall the merger integrates elements of economic and workforce development, to give our region a competitive edge.”

Some of these integrated solutions include focus on addressing the workforce needs of high growth sectors in the region, infusing youth into summer employment with stimulus funds, creating make-shift satellite offices through volunteers to help those that have been laid off, and accelerating high demand green jobs. For more information about the merger and PCFWD’s response to our region’s economic challenges, check out the homepage video at www.PCFWD.org

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