## STATE OF ILLINOIS

**EMPLOYMENT and ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY for PERSONS with DISABILITIES TASK FORCE**



## ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

Prepared and submitted by the Illinois Department of Human Services

*State Efforts to Improve Employment and Economic Opportunity for People with Disabilities*

*As required by PA96-368*

*May 2020 - May 2021*

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# I. EEOPD TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

*Emily Miller, Illinois Governor’s Office\**

*Rafael Rivera, IDHS Substance Use Prevention and Recovery*

*Darius McKinney, IDHS Division of Mental Health*

*Maria Martinez-McKinley, IDHS Division of Rehabilitation Services*

*Sherry Hinds, IDHS Division of Developmental Disabilities*

*Ahlam Jbara, IDHS Family and Community Services*

*Gabriela Moroney, Healthcare and Family Services*

*Craig Morrison, Veterans’ Affairs*

*Lisa Jones, Commerce and Economic Opportunity*

*Anna D’Ascenzo, Employment Security*

*Chris Bond, Central Management Services*

*Bambi Bethel-Leitschuh, Juvenile Justice*

*Arthur Sutton, Board of Higher Education*

*Melvin Harrison, Illinois Community College Board*

*Mariel Hamer-Sinclair, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities*

*Kimberly Mercer-Schleider, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities*

*Margaret Harkness, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities*

*Dennis Deany, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities*

*LaMetrice Lane, Illinois State Board of Education*

*Barry Taylor, Equip for Equality*

*Phil Milsk, Attorney and Public Policy Advocate*

*Josh Evans, Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities*

*Kathy Carmody, Institute on Public Policy for People with Disabilities*

*Susy Woods, Illinois Assistive Technology Program*

*Lore Baker, The Association for Individual Development*

*Kari Selk, ABC Illinois*

*Maria Doughty\*, The Chicago Network*

*Patty Walters, Developmental Services Center*

*Teresa Garate\*, The Gateway Foundation*

*Rory Conran, The Menta Group*

*Christina McGleam, City of Chicago, Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities*

*Mary Margaret Sharp-Pucci, Loyola University Chicago*

\*Co-chairs

**II. *REPORT* *BACKGROUND***

The EEOPD Task Force was created by the General Assembly in 2009 to “analyze programs and policies of the state to determine what changes, modifications, and innovations may be necessary to remove barriers to competitive employment and economic opportunity for persons with disabilities. The Task Force makes recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor including regulatory changes that would advance employment and economic opportunity for persons with disabilities in Illinois.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The State of Illinois legislature passed legislation in 2013 declaring Illinois an Employment First State[[2]](#footnote-2) with the objective to ensure that people with disabilities are given the option to engage in integrated, competitive employment at or above minimum wage. An executive order signed in 2014 set forth a process for Illinois to achieve this goal.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The Task Force created five workgroups to support the Employment First initiative: Workforce Development, Provider, Employer, Legislative, and Transition Workgroups. In 2018, the Task Force created a Recommendations Report, detailing implementation strategies for the state of Illinois in each of the five Workgroup focus areas.

**Workforce Development Workgroup**

* Reviewed and revised the Workgroup’s priorities.
* Continued our advocacy for the Governor’s office to support our recommendations to ensure that the State Use Program and Business Enterprise Program conform to Employment First principles.
* Successfully advocated that the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities be added to EEOPD Task Force to ensure that employment efforts and initiatives of the State and Chicago are more coordinated.
* Convened a meeting of the State of Illinois and City of Chicago’s Business Enterprise Programs to discuss ways for the two groups to coordinate and collaborate, including a reciprocity registration program.
* Monitored ongoing litigation and settlement negotiations in Leskovisek v. Illinois Department of Transportation, challenging the State’s failure to provide accommodations for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the job application process who are unable to comply with current Rutan examination and interview.
* Via the efforts of the Work Group Co-Chair, worked with the State of Illinois on four areas of accessibility: 1) accessibility of the State’s conference and webcasting platform; 2) accessibility of the State’s online forms and management systems for applicants pursuing State employment and/or advancement within State employment; 3) modernization of State websites in order to make them accessible for people with disabilities; and 4) accessibility of IDES services on online resources, including application for unemployment benefits.

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**Provider Workgroup**

* The EEOPD Provider Committee met 1/21/21 to review past recommendations and discuss current concerns. Committee members agreed that previously submitted recommendations regarding system issues continue to impact employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The main challenge committee members discussed was the impact COVID-19 had and continues to have on provider organizations’ ability to support people to obtain and maintain community employment. While vaccination availability was expected to reduce this concern, the emergence of the Delta variant and continued restrictions on community access have severely limited employment activity in community organizations.
* A further complicating factor is the nationwide staffing shortage facing community organizations which impacts daily agency operations causing potential employment staff to be re-assigned to direct staffing duties in agency residential operations.
* While the staffing challenges facing businesses across the country is well documented, the impact on disability provider organizations is intensified due to the inability to adapt pricing, business models and other options available to non-disability businesses (e.g., a residential program cannot “close” for certain days due to short staffing). While the COVID impact may lessen (hopefully) in the near future, we don’t yet see signs of staff returning to or choosing disability agencies as employment opportunities which is essential to allow disability agencies to redeploy employment staff and resume pre-pandemic employment operations.
* Committee chair is meeting with IDHS staff early next week to strategize next steps and will reconvene the Employment Committee for discussion in advance of our next full EEOPD meeting.

**Employer Workgroup**

* For the last year, the Private Employer Work Group has mainly focused on identifying and requesting other private employers to participate in the Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities Task Force. We understand that to really make a change and increase the representation in the workforce, in the hiring of people with disabilities, a lot of work must be done in coordination and partnership with the private employer industry.
* We appreciate that most of the work in this are best done as partnerships with institutional support and knowledge of others leading the way. Based on this belief we have met, discussed, and requested private employer partnership[s with several private employers over the last year.
* One hardship the Private Employer Work Group has faced in the last year has been getting the private employers to participate in the task force. Devoting the time, especially in light of the pandemic, to a partnership, where they face already drained resources, worker shortages, and for some businesses a complete shutdown of operations is not feasible.
* Businesses have had to shift priorities during the pandemic which has put a further strain on private business participation in the task force.
* As employers start to return to pre-pandemic procedures and work, the Private Employer Work Group hopes to resume the search and identification of private employers who value and are eager to be involved in the task force.

**Legislative Workgroup**

* The legislative workgroup decided that it would support an effort to amend the Illinois Procurement Code to create and exemption for the acquisition of adaptive equipment, assistive technology, repairs and replacement parts, and other modifications and adjustments so that employees, customers, and job applicants with disabilities could enjoy the benefits of each State governmental agency. The idea for the legislation came from the EEOPD taskforce.
* The legislation is HB 2616 (Mussman/Fine). The Illinois Assistive Technology Program is the lead proponent of the bill. It has passed the House and is now in the Senate. We expect the bill to be assigned to committee soon. No further amendments are anticipated for this bill.

**Transition Workgroup**

* The Transition Workgroup reviewed the 2017 Recommendations Report to determine whether the priorities are still relevant. The Workgroup engaged in a rating/organizing activity to determine high impact/low impact and low effort/high effort in order to move forward strategically. Current work involves collaborating across state agencies and several organizations to provide a comprehensive picture of service needs, services provided, and outcomes.
* Co-Chair leadership roles for the Transition workgroup have been filled and the membership assessed for diversity and inclusivity. Agencies represented in the Transition workgroup include state agencies, universities, community colleges, disability specific organizations, special education cooperative and school boards, advisory councils, parent organizations and a private citizen. Critical new members have been and continue to be recruited. An updated membership roster is available. Meeting dates have been set for the coming year.
* Co-Chairs developed an organizing structure which included the creation of a state agency subgroup. The state agency subgroup consists of representatives from the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities, Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice School District 428, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Division of Mental Health, Illinois Board of Higher Education, and Illinois Community College Board.
* Monthly meeting dates have been scheduled for 2021 for the state agency sub-group to continue work on tasks assigned to the EEOPD upon the repealing of The Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) Act. The Transition Work Group’s second goal (Goal 2) from the 2017 Recommendation Report (Revise and expand tracking system for students through transition into adult services) has been prioritized for this state agency sub-group.

**III. *KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS* *OVERVIEW – MAY 2021***

The EEOPD Task Force met four times this year, all meetings were conducted remotely using videoconferencing. In person meetings were restricted due to the ongoing global pandemic. All members have acknowledged challenges for the taskforce because of the pandemic which might have resulted in slowed momentum in accomplishing certain goals and objectives. Nevertheless, key accomplishments include:

* EEOPD member provided an overview of Project NEON, a new initiative offered by ODEP to provide technical support to provider organizations, in order to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with significant disabilities. IARF has been selected to participate. (From 5/2020 under provider)
* CMS is reviewing the Clerical Trainee Opt SE (Supported Employee) title, which is one of the final steps. Applications for open positions will be submitted to the Disabled Workers Training Program for verification. CMS will grade the candidate (pass/fail). The Eligibility List is then sent to the hiring agency to interview. The interview process is still to be determined. Once hired, the new employee begins the certification process to transition to the targeted clerical title, i.e., Office Associate, Office Assistant, etc. Barry Taylor expressed concern regarding accommodations for the interview process. Many individuals with a disability will have difficulty with the Rutan Interview process. The number one barrier, the testing process, has been eliminated. Fuller advised that the Rutan Interview does include accommodations as part of the process, and Anna D’Ascenzo recommended ensuring the Equal Employment Office be involved in the interview process.
* Proposed legislation to exempt State acquisition of equipment or services, for State Employee reasonable accommodation, from the procurement bidding process.
* Task Force membership updated to reflect new appointees.

## IV. NEXT STEPS

Next Steps are measurable actions the EEOPD plans to take for the upcoming year. Next Steps are comprised of recommendations from the 2018 EEOPD Recommendations report, and the professional recommendations of task force workgroups with the goal of reforming existing employment systems for people with disabilities in the State of Illinois. Next Steps include:

* In collaboration, the Legislative Committee is accepting referrals from the task force as they will continue to work with the Governor’s Office and Legislators to remove barriers and support employment for people with disabilities.
* The Workforce Development workgroup is strategizing to file a bill with support from administration, technical support, and Central Management Systems (CMS).
* The Transition Workgroup is evaluating next steps but meeting as a subgroup to evaluate predictors of post-secondary measures as their point of focus.
* The Provider Workgroup plans to schedule an open zoom forum that will be available to community employment providers and interested parties to provide an update on committee activities and obtain input from attendees.
* The Employer Workgroup is currently in the process of identifying private employers who seek to join the task force or work collaboratively with private employers on inclusion and diversifying the private workplace.
* Task Force Chairpersons and IDHS Administrators will meet with the Governor’s office to discuss a timetable for annual reporting.
1. Illinois General Assembly. (20 ILCS 4095) Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities Task Force Act. Springfield, IL: 8/13/2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Illinois General Assembly. (Public Act 098-0091) Illinois Employment First Act. Springfield, IL: 07/16/2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Illinois Office of Governor Pat Quinn. Executive Order Implementing Employment First in Illinois. Springfield, IL: Illinois Executive Department. 6/3/2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)