

**STATE OF ILLINOIS: EMPLOYMENT and ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY for PERSONS with DISABILITIES TASK FORCE**

**ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT**

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

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

EEOPD Task Force Membership 2

Executive Summary 3

Workforce Development Workgroup 5

Transition Workgroup 7

Employer Workgroup 9

Provider Workgroup 11

Legislative Workgroup 13

**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

**Kari Selk**

ABC Illinois

**Maria Doughty\***

The Chicago Network

**Patty Walters**

Developmental Services Center

**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*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The EEOPD Taskforce was established in 2009 via Legislation (PA 96-368). Its purpose, 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 opportunities 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.

Moreover, the Task Force encompasses sixteen designated State Agencies: Governor’s Office, Education (ISBE, CCO, IBHE), DCEO, Health and Human Services, Divisions of: Vocational Rehabilitation, Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health, DD Council, IDES, Veterans Affairs. In addition, fifteen public members (at least 5 who are disabled) serve on the Task Force. This diverse stakeholder group is comprised of representatives from the following sectors:

* Statewide organizations that advocate for persons with physical, developmental, and psychiatric disabilities
* Entities with expertise in assistive technology devices and services for persons with disabilities
* Entities that provide employment and training services to persons with disabilities
* Advocates for veterans with disabilities
* Centers for independent living & disability services providers
* Organized labor
* Higher education
* Private sector business community
* Entities that provide employment and training services to persons with disabilities

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT WORKGROUP**

**COMMITMENT:**

* Align with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
* Develop strategies to make the state a model employer
* Evaluate the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and the State Use Program in relationship with Employment First principles
* Ensure that state agency web-based information and tools are readily accessible and usable by persons with disabilities
* Establish a training protocol on Employment First for new and existing state employees

**ACHIEVEMENTS:**

* State Use Program: Successfully advocated for Governor Pritzker to issue an Executive Order that prohibits State Use contracts from paying worker’s sub-minimum wage. Existing contracts already paying sub-minimum wage were re-negotiated by the State. Efforts to codify this into legislation are ongoing
* Business Enterprise Program: continued to advocate that the State revise its regulations so that sheltered workshops are no longer considered a disability owned business
* Accessibility of State Services Related to Employment: The Workforce Development Work Group collaborated with the Governor’s Office, CMS, IDES and DoIT to ensure that State employment-related services are accessible to people with disabilities, including unemployment services, employment forms, stage agency websites and the WebEx platform
* Reasonable Accommodations for State Workers: In conjunction with the EEOPD Legislative Committee, the Workforce Development Work Group drafted and advocated for legislation that would remove reasonable accommodations (such as those involving assistive technology) from the Illinois Procurement Code, and therefore avoid unnecessary delays providing reasonable accommodations to state employees. The legislation was passed by the General Assembly, signed by the Governor, and is now in effect
* Removing Employment Application Barriers: Identified a barrier to employment for persons with disabilities as many people with disabilities, including those with developmental and intellectual disabilities were unable to comply with the State’s employment application process, which included testing and interview. As a result, the State of Illinois and Equip for Equality entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to negotiate and try to resolve this issue. The Workforce Development Workgroup is carefully monitoring these negotiations

**NEXT STEPS:**

* The Workforce Development Work Group had an initial meeting with Division of Rehabilitation Services Director Rahnee Patrick about ways to collaborate with the Interagency Committee of Employees with Disabilities (ICED) on the shared priority of the State of Illinois being a model employer. Strategies in the coming year may include advocating for the State to adopt a 7% hiring goal for people with disabilities and creating a disability-hiring preference, similar to the State’s veterans’ preference

**TRANSITION WORKGROUP**

**COMMITMENT:**

* Develop a comprehensive system of transition services/practices that is seamless, easily accessed, culturally competent, geographically sensitive and results in desired post-school outcomes that allow school districts to prepare transition plans and offer services to students
* Revise and expand tracking system for students through transition into adult services, in order to properly monitor services and outcomes
* Ensure that students who have been part of the Juvenile Justice System or Department of Children and Family Services or in the eligibility categories of an Emotional Disability have access to preparatory experiences and development opportunities as well as that they are appropriately placed, supported, and retain necessary services
* Ensure alignment between the IDEA transition planning requirements and the Person-Centered Requirements of the HCBS Medicaid Waiver Rules
* Ensure that Post-Secondary Education Services and Supports are available and in-line with the protections provide by Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

**ACHIEVEMENTS:**

* The EEOPD Transition Workgroup operates with three co-chairs and membership is periodically reviewed to monitor diversity and inclusivity. An updated membership roster is available. Meeting dates have been set and shared for 2022
* The Transition Workgroup membership currently includes participants from state agencies, universities, community colleges, disability specific organizations, special education cooperative and school boards, advisory councils, parent organizations and a private citizen
* 2018 Recommendation Report Goals 1, 3, 4 and 5 are the focus for the full Workgroup and priorities for each have been assessed using a high/low impact and high/low effort prioritizing strategy. See the 2018 EEOPD Taskforce Recommendations Report
* The Transition Workgroup developed a State Agency Subgroup. The State Agency Subgroup includes 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
* The Subgroup continues to prioritize goal #2 from the 2017 Recommendations Report, revising and expanding the tracking system for students through transition into adult services. Monthly meetings focus on transition specific data. During full group quarterly meetings, updates are provided, and resources and practices are shared. Concerns and comments shared are used to inform planning for the State agencies
* Completed activities tasks within the subgroup includes a data exploratory/analysis exercise to identify barriers to competitive employment and patterns of inequity for persons with disabilities. Members presented information regarding the supports and services provided to their target population to increase shared understanding and establish a common vocabulary
* Current subgroup focus is on a). Patterns of inequities for persons with disabilities b). Current data available c). Data needs and d). Non-traditional data sources to consider. Work is framed using evidenced-based and research-based predictors of postsecondary employment success which are used to inform data collection

**NEXT STEPS:**

* State agency representatives also are assessing the interplay of participating State agencies’ missions to ensure the work aligns with the mission of the Transition Work Group. Participants will be asked to present their transition specific data to determine intersectionality between agencies and post-secondary outcomes as it relates to linkages to community agencies for transition age youth
* Members are having preliminary discussions for ways to integrate data from respective agencies to make it usable to inform decision making. An analysis of data will provide the EEOPD Transition workgroup and taskforce with recommendations for further transition specific interventions and activities

**COMMITMENT:**

**EMPLOYER WORKGROUP**

* Develop an awareness campaign to educate employers, both private and public, regarding the benefits, incentives and value proposition of hiring, training, retaining and advancement of persons with disabilities
* Create a shared service portal for employers and vocational providers
* Implement a functional system to connect employers with vocational providers
* Develop and execute a meaningful and validated measurement process

**ACHIEVEMENTS:**

* Focused on creating a synergy between private employers and persons with disabilities seeking competitive and integrated work experience. Toward this effort, it has explored a variety of meaningful ways to engage private employers in the discussion surrounding the education and awareness campaign for employing persons with disabilities so that both the employers and the job seekers have a clearer understanding of the benefits associated with employing a truly diverse workforce which includes persons with disabilities. Identifying a value proposition and incentive information about hiring, training, retaining, and advancement of persons with disabilities has been a key lever in the Workgroup’s strategy
* Implementing a functional and beneficial system which connects job seekers with private employers furthers one of the main objectives of the EEOPD Task Force which is to further self-sufficiency through workforce initiatives
* Lastly, the Employer workgroup worked to create a meaningful and validated measurement process which would assist in determining success factors

**NEXT STEPS:**

* For the last year the Employer Work Group has mainly worked to identify and request other private employers to participate in the Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities Task Force.  To make a meaningful change and increase the representation in persons with disabilities in the work force, there must be coordination and partnership with the private employers. We appreciate that most of the work in this area is 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 partnerships with several private employers over the last year. One major hardship that the Workgroup has faced in the last year is 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 shut-down of operations was not always feasible
* Businesses have had to shift priorities during the pandemic which has put the further strain on private business participation in the Task Force. However, as employers start to return to pre-pandemic procedures and work, the Employer Work Group will resume the search and identification of private employers who value and are eager to be involved in the Task Force

**PROVIDER WORKGROUP**

**COMMITMENT:**

* Identify long-term policy changes required to support systems change to align with the principles of Employment First
* Identify current employment strategies that providers have used successfully
* Support community providers to convert existing infrastructure to support competitive integrated employment
* Create a rate structure that incentivizes providers who utilize Employment First models and employment outcomes and assure that it applies equally to individuals with the most complex and challenging disabilities
* Develop a plan to rebalance the current service structure to wrap-around day services that support employment outcomes

**ACHIEVEMENTS:**

* Did not have substantive activity in 2021 due to the ongoing COVID pandemic and provider agencies continued focus on the health and wellbeing of people they support
* The Workgroup reaffirmed the following priorities
* Transportation access
* Community agencies having direct access to people seeking employment
* Transition planning with an emphasis on employment
* Create the expectation that all people with disabilities will work
* Expand the IPS model which has proven effective
* Increase training in customized employment
* Have the state adopt the employment services recommendations for people with I/DD outlined in the Guidehouse Rate Study report
* Held a workgroup meeting in April 2022, along with IDHS employment disability leaders to review current employment activities and priorities for moving forward.

**NEXT STEPS:**

* A full Committee meeting will be held prior to the end of the current fiscal year

**LEGISLATIVE WORKGROUP**

**COMMITMENT:**

* Work with the full Task Force and each of the workgroups/subcommittees to identify legislative priorities for advocacy
* Provide information, technical guidance, and make recommendations to members of the General Assembly as well as to legislative liaisons/staff from the state agencies regarding introduced legislation to ensure alignment with Employment First principles and best practices

**ACHIEVEMENTS:**

* The Legislative Subcommittee met several times prior to the beginning of the Spring 2022 session of the General Assembly
* Endorsed legislation to amend the Section of the Illinois Procurement Code concerning the State Use Program so it would align with an Executive Order issued by the Governor in October 2021, that eliminated sub-minimum wages in the State Use Program. The legislation, SB 3047, was filed by Sen. Joyce at the request of the Arc of Illinois and New Star Services, Inc. The bill was assigned to the Senate Executive Committee, and then was held up while an omnibus Procurement Code bill was being developed

**NEXT STEPS:**

* The language from SB 3047 was not included in the omnibus bill, and the legislative workgroup is the process of trying to find out the reason why the language was not included as both CMS and IDHS expressed support for the legislation
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)