Employment First Cabinet Annual Report

Interagency Priorities and Recommendations

(Act 36 of 2018)

January 30, 2026

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Office of Governor Josh Shapiro

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January 30, 2026

My Fellow Pennsylvanians:

In Pennsylvania, our greatest asset is our people. Pennsylvanians are the hardest working people in our country – and our ingenuity, grit, and dedication have powered progress for generations.

From day one, my Administration has worked to break down barriers and ensure every Pennsylvanian has the freedom to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed. Fundamentally, Employment First is about just that: making sure that every person who wants to has the chance to work in a competitive integrated environment, supported and empowered by their employer, their colleagues, and their government.

Today, Pennsylvania's workforce faces many challenges, from a workplace undergoing rapid technological changes to demands from employers for more workers with new and specialized skills. But these challenges present significant opportunities here in the Commonwealth, and my Administration is advancing the cause of Employment First across agencies with innovative workforce development strategies and thoughtful employer engagement. We've continued to connect Pennsylvanians with training opportunities and on-the-job learning opportunities, from the Hiram G. Andrews Center to the first-ever Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps crew made up entirely of young people who are deaf or hard of hearing. I am proud of what we as a Commonwealth have achieved so far and what we will accomplish together.

I want to thank the Pennsylvania Employment First Commission for its leadership, expertise, and unwavering commitment to advancing competitive integrated employment across the Commonwealth. Your partnership and dedication have helped turn the promise of Employment First into meaningful opportunities for Pennsylvanians of all abilities.

Together with Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis, I am committed to fulfilling the promise at the heart of the Employment First Act to ensure every Pennsylvanian has a seat at the table. Competitive Integrated Employment helps all Pennsylvanians, both employers and workers alike, with or without disability. An inclusive workforce is the cornerstone of a robust economy, and I encourage all businesses, educational and training institutions, community leaders, and citizens to build a Pennsylvania that works for all and welcomes everyone – because when more people are at the table of progress, we all benefit.

Sincerely,

Governor Josh Shapiro

II. Introduction

All Pennsylvanians should have the opportunity to pursue employment that leads to family-sustaining wages and a positive sense of self, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is committed to supporting these jobseekers on their journey. Of equal importance, the Commonwealth is also committed to supporting employers in the development of inclusive hiring and retention practices so that workers of all abilities can earn a fair wage in a good job. By equipping employers with the tools, they need to accommodate the diverse needs of all workers, and by connecting more Pennsylvanians to meaningful work, this Commonwealth can build, sustain, and grow a vibrant economy that serves everyone.

Pennsylvania became an Employment First state when Governor Tom Wolf signed Executive Order 2016-03 on March 10, 2016. This Executive Order made Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) the first consideration and preferred outcome of publicly funded education, training, employment and related services, and long-term services and supports for individuals with a disability. Subsequently, the Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities (Cabinet), established by Act 36 of 2018, further defined the role of state government in advancing Employment First principles: to ensure the implementation of this policy through strong interagency collaboration and stakeholder engagement. The Governor's Policy Office is responsible for coordinating the Cabinet, which consists of 17 state agencies and state-related entities.[1]

Act 36 of 2018 also established the Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC), a body comprised of 16 external appointees, four legislative appointments and twelve gubernatorial appointments, who collectively make recommendations to the Commonwealth on ways to further Employment First values and ensure that people with disabilities are given the opportunity to obtain meaningful employment and life-sustaining wages.

[1] Act 36 requires the participation of 16 state agencies and state-related entities. The Department of Corrections, the 17th state agency, began participating as an ex-officio member in 2024.

The Governor’s Cabinet for People with Disabilities Membership

The Cabinet includes representatives from (top to bottom, left to right): the Human Relations Commission (PHRC), State Civil Service Commission (SCSC), Department of Labor and Industry (L&I), Department of Human Services (DHS), Department of State (DOS), Office of Administration (OA), Department of Education (PDE), Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Department of Transportation (PennDOT), Department of Health (DOH), Council on the Arts (PCA), Developmental Disabilities Council (PADDC), Department of Aging (PDA), Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), Governor's Office, and Housing Finance Agency (PHFA).

Since 2024, the Department of Corrections (DOC) also has contributed to the work of the Employment First Cabinet.

Pennsylvania's Employment First Core Values

Person-Centered: Each person is a unique individual with their own interests, strengths, and abilities with the power to take an active role in the planning, services, and opportunities that are most meaningful to them.

Holistic: Individuals are members of families and communities, so services are provided with recognition that an individual's circumstances must be considered and that barriers may need to be addressed for effective service delivery and attainment of desired outcomes.

Equitable: Services are delivered regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, and disability, so that everyone has access to opportunities.

Collaborative: Partnership and meaningful stakeholder engagement are at the center of service delivery by agencies in state, federal, and local government. The Employment First policy is informed by insight and feedback from advocates who are experts in the field, providers who work directly with customers each day, and the individuals who are directly receiving services.

Data-Informed: Data helps monitor progress on achieving outcomes, identify areas of success and opportunity, and inform decision making in policy and programming. Data is publicly available to ensure transparency and collaboration.

Act 36 of 2018 defines Employment First as "The policy of State agencies which provides that Competitive Integrated Employment [CIE] is the first consideration and preferred outcome of publicly funded education, training, employment and related services, and long-term services and support for individuals with a disability." According to the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, CIE is

> work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis for which an individual is: compensated at or above minimum wage and comparable to the customary rate paid by the employer to employees without disabilities performing similar duties and with similar training and experience; receiving the same level of benefits provided to other employees without disabilities in similar positions; at a location where the employee interacts with other individuals without disabilities; and presented opportunities for advancement similar to other employees without disabilities in similar positions.[2]

[2] "Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)," *Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor*. Accessed January 21, 2025. https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie

Under current state and federal law, some employers may seek an exemption from minimum wage standards to pay people with disabilities less than the current state minimum wage of $7.25 an hour. Employers with these exemptions are typically referred to as "sheltered workshops" and must obtain a 14(c) certificate, referencing the section in the Fair Labor Standards Act that governs such subminimum wage arrangements.

As of mid-December 2025, there are 44 current 14(c) certificate holders in the Commonwealth. These settings are largely segregated, meaning people with disabilities are separated from their non-disabled peers and paid on a piece rate, or based on volume of work produced. For example, an individual in a sheltered workshop might be paid $0.01 per silverware packet assembled. Under the Biden Administration, the U.S. Department of Labor proposed a rule that would phase out 14(c) certificates and thereby gradually eliminate subminimum wages. As of July 7, 2025, the Department of Labor withdrew its proposal from further consideration.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2020-2024 Five-Year Estimate, approximately 14.2 percent of Pennsylvanians have a disability, higher than the national average of 13 percent. Additionally, the median salary of Pennsylvanians with a disability is $29,979, compared to the national average of $31,436. As of mid-December 2025, there are 3,194 workers who are employed by 14(c) certificate holders in the Commonwealth, a declining trend since the enactment of Act 36 of 2018.

The Shapiro-Davis Administration (Administration) is committed to upholding the values and goals laid out in Act 36 to enhance employment outcomes for individuals with a disability. As required by the Act, this annual report contains information about progress made since the last report was issued and provides insight into the strategic direction of the Commonwealth as advised by the Cabinet and EFOC, ensuring individuals with disabilities have opportunities to achieve economic independence through CIE.

III. Executive Summary

Individuals seeking CIE face many barriers, including a lack of understanding and education within the business community, insufficient or unreliable supportive services, and the complex nature of navigating benefits. Many employers may be unaware of the value and capabilities of individuals with disabilities and are often unfamiliar with the services that are available to them in supporting employees with disabilities. Sometimes, people with disabilities need additional support at work to help them navigate tasks effectively. This support can include essential services like transportation to and from work, direct care support for activities of daily living, and workplace accommodations to enhance productivity. Moreover, the intricate system of state and federal benefits and overlapping eligibilities can deter individuals from pursuing higher wage positions, especially when it could mean losing essential healthcare or support services.

Act 36 of 2018 required the Commonwealth to develop an initial three-year plan. This first three-year plan included priority areas and recommendations designed to embed Employment First CIE policy into daily operations across agencies. The January 2025 iteration of this annual report served as the second update on the three-year plan under the Administration. The 2025 report included 2024 data and highlighted how state agencies provided reliable services while promoting innovation across program areas throughout 2024.

2024 Highlights:

Shapiro Administration Secured DSP Wage Increase

The Administration led the effort to secure $280 million in the 2024–2025 budget to increase hourly wages for direct support professionals (DSPs) and a $74.8 million infusion to clear the emergency waitlist for the Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) waivers so that more Pennsylvanians can get the care they need. As of August 31, 2025, 3,213 individuals over the age of 21 were on ODP's emergency waitlist, a number that continues to decline as all counties are actively enrolling additional adults into home- and community-based services. The list prioritizes individuals who have a need for services within six months for enrollment in available waiver slots.

HIRE Committee and Inclusive Hiring

On May 13, 2024, Governor Shapiro signed Executive Order 2024-01, which established the Hire, Improve, Recruit, and Empower (HIRE) Committee and set strategic direction for the Commonwealth to establish inclusive practices. The Executive Order specifically states that the purpose of the group is to ensure that "the policies and programs of the Commonwealth [serve] as a model for other employers in the Commonwealth and as such, the Commonwealth's policies should reflect its position as a model employer."

Employment First Data Dashboard

In 2024, the Cabinet redeveloped the Employment First Data Dashboard to include recurring data requests from the EFOC. The Dashboard is categorized as follows: Pennsylvania Labor; Education and Training; Healthcare, Services, and Supports; State Employment; and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Cabinet redeveloped the dashboard to promote transparency, accessibility, and information sharing among EFOC and the public.

Pathways to Partnership (P2P) Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Grant

In 2023, the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) was awarded more than $9.9 million from the US Department of Education (DOE) to enhance the independence of children, students, and youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania through training opportunities and increased Pre-Employment Transition Service experiences. OVR partnered on this P2P DIF grant with the federally funded Centers for Independent Living, ODP, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network to administer the grant from the duration of the grant award from October 2023 through September 2028. The grant focuses on three pathways:

a. Professional Development, Capacity Building, and Training;
b. Transition Planning Program; and
c. Community-Based Instruction and Work Based Learning Experiences.

During year one of the P2P DIF Grant Project, a total of 343 individuals benefited directly from OVR activities.

Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Grant

OVR received $13.9 million in 2022 as a part of DOE's SWTCIE grant. OVR is moving away from subminimum wage employment arrangements by implementing projects that use a supportive wraparound model for individuals and employers. Under this grant, OVR launched the Integrated Vocational Engagement and Support Team (InVEST) Project to provide resources for individuals and employers to move towards a CIE model.

InVEST has three primary components: CIE Engagement; CIE Service/Resource Coordination; and CIE Supports. OVR and ODP have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to implement the InVEST project. Utilizing integrated resource teams effectively is a primary component of the grant's service/resource coordination focus, to accurately identify and deliver necessary support and services to make obtaining and maintaining CIE achievable. OVR secured provider contracts with Achieva/Sheetz and KenCrest/Community Integrated Services, which facilitate the hiring of people with disabilities and support specialists.

MAWD and MAWD:WJS

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) administers the Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD) program to provide healthcare coverage for working people with a disability. To be eligible for MAWD, countable income must be below 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and the individual must have less than $10,000 in countable assets.

A common concern related to achieving CIE is that an increase in wages and savings could result in losing crucial health benefits. The MAWD for Workers with Job Success (MAWD:WJS) program is a relatively new benefit that DHS implemented in 2023 that enables an individual to be able to retain their MAWD benefit by paying a higher monthly premium to retain MAWD coverage for essential healthcare services. MAWD:WJS is for eligible individuals with a disability who make between 250 percent and 600 percent of the FPL. The premium that an individual pays is unique to their income and assets.

MCO Pay for Performance Incentive

For the first time, the 2024 Community Health Choices (CHC) agreement included a pay for performance incentive to Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) to increase the number of individuals 21-64 years old who are employed. To receive incentive payments, MCOs are required to reach a target of 2.5 percent of individuals aged 21-64 receiving services and participating in a CIE workforce setting. ODP also is implementing performance-based contracting for residential services to incentivize service providers to connect individuals with CIE and related support. This started January 1, 2025.

CODE PA and Digital Accessibility

The Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience (CODE PA), established in April 2023 by Governor Shapiro via Executive Order 2023-08, is working to improve digital accessibility across Commonwealth websites, applications, and services so all Pennsylvanians, including older adults and people with disabilities, can access critical online services. Ahead of forthcoming federal regulations from the U.S. Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services, CODE PA is prioritizing accessibility readiness by April 2026 through risk-based testing of high-traffic resident-facing digital services, including applications such as COMPASS and PATH. Progress is further supported through partnerships with OVR, engaging people with disabilities as testers to ensure services meet real-world needs. The Employment First Cabinet and Oversight Commission collaborated to assess opportunities for improvement and address barriers to CIE. In 2025, all Cabinet agencies submitted a **self-assessment** to EFOC and **completely updated all data on the Employment First Data Dashboard**. The agency self-assessments provided an opportunity to evaluate ongoing initiatives, to share progress in advancing CIE principles, and to inform this report. The Dashboard makes data analysis more

accessible for EFOC and increases the transparency of programs, services, and benefits administered by the Commonwealth.

This Annual Report by the Employment First Cabinet has six thematic sections:

- Service Provision and Benefit Coordination
    - Efforts maintaining effective delivery of quality supports to ensure that individuals receive the support they need to be successful in their careers
- Accessibility
    - Initiatives ensuring individuals of all ability statuses can easily navigate and interface with state government resources
- The Commonwealth as a Model Employer
    - Steps taken to establish the Commonwealth as a model employer that promotes diversity and accessibility in the workplace
- Other Agency Initiatives
    - Assessments, plans, and reports undertaken by various agencies relevant to Employment First as well as public awareness campaigns, grant opportunities, and cross-agency efforts
- Response to the EFOC Report
    - EFOC recommendations under consideration and best efforts that will be made to meet identified targets
- Recommendations and Future Direction
    - Priority policy areas to guide future work as well as administrative priorities

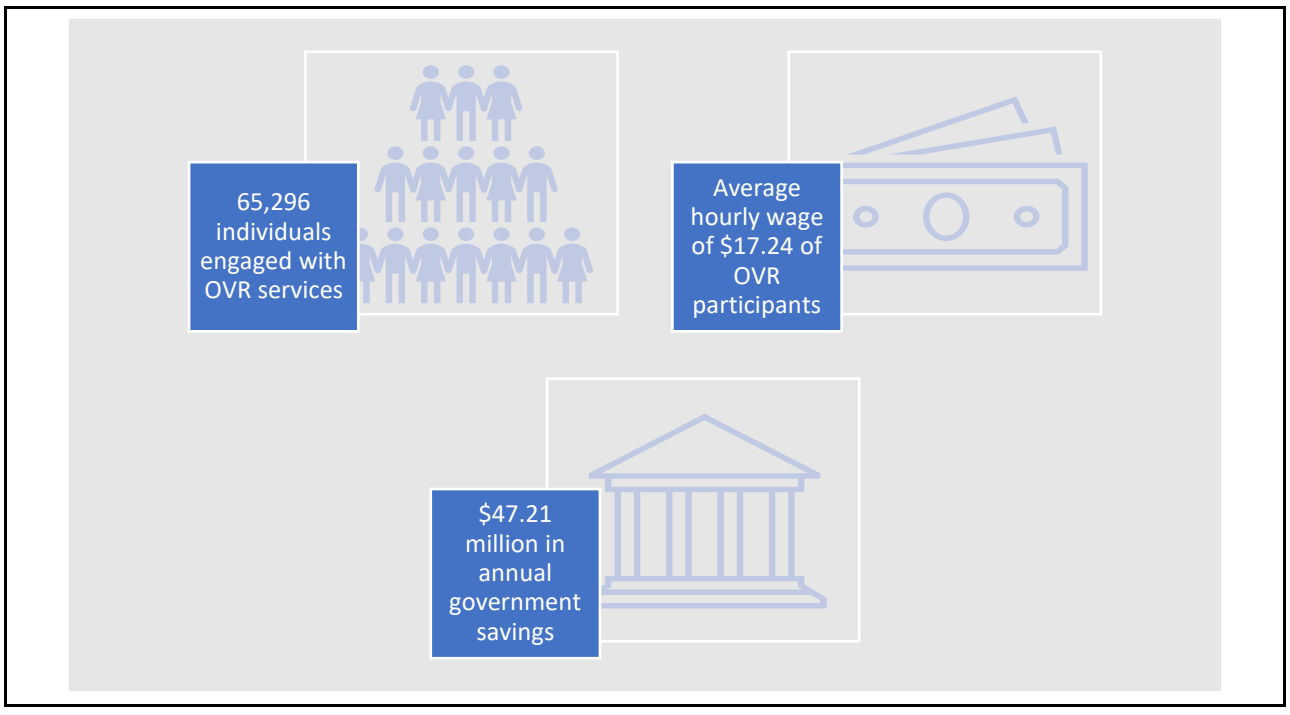
The report also includes Appendices.

IV. Service Provision and Benefit Coordination

Commonwealth agencies under the Governor's jurisdiction have a responsibility to serve all Pennsylvanians, and especially those Pennsylvanians with disabilities. The primary agencies that administer programs and benefits for people with disabilities include the Department of Labor and Industry (L&I), the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Education (PDE), and the Department of Corrections (DOC).

Department of Labor and Industry

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) provides vocational rehabilitation services to Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Services include a dedicated OVR counselor, who serves as a coordinator to ensure that individuals are receiving adequate support to prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment. These supportive services include, but are not limited to, counseling and guidance, diagnostic services, assessments, information and referrals, job development and placement, sign language interpreters, job coaches, and other personal assistive services and/or devices. The outcomes of OVR participation emulate the philosophy of Employment First.



Business Services

Employment First is helping OVR engage with more providers and businesses and collaborate directly with the Administration and First Lady of Pennsylvania. The Administration continues to create strategic partnerships with businesses to provide employment and work experience for people with disabilities. First Lady Lori Shapiro, Chief Transformation Officer Benjamin Kirshner, L&I Secretary Nancy Walker and Special Advisor to the L&I Secretary Carol Momjian, strongly recommend OVR services when speaking with employers. Along with Business Services staff, they have been meeting directly with employers and provide businesses with first-hand experience partnering with OVR. First Lady Shapiro is a champion for OVR, often referencing her own experience with an OVR intern hired on last summer.

Some of the employers visited include Wawa, Cleanlogic, PECO, VF Corporation, and Johnson Matthey. OVR continuously works with employers to develop long lasting partnerships that will provide placement opportunities for OVR jobseekers.

Some highlights of the collaborative effort among the individuals listed above include:

- In March 2025, students from CTI's Culinary Arts Associate in Specialized Technology program were invited to the Governor's Residence, allowing the students to work alongside the executive chef and culinary staff to prepare a luncheon buffet for First Lady Shapiro.
- Executives from the Office of Transformation and Opportunity attended a tour of the Commonwealth Technical Institute at the Hiram G. Andrew Center in Johnstown, PA, in May 2025.
- OVR has continued to foster employer and partner relationships with assistance from the First Lady of PA and the Office of Transformation.
- Governor's Policy Office Assistant Deputy Secretary Erin Corrigan and Project Executive Rose McCarthy attended a tour of CTI at HGAC campus and presented at the scheduled quarterly Board Meeting held on site in September 2025.
- First Lady Lori Shapiro delivered remarks at Villanova University's United Inclusive Employment Symposium, highlighting student achievement and the importance of inclusive hiring for Pennsylvanians with disabilities. OVR served as an expert panelist with employers from Wawa, KPMG, and Comcast.
- First Lady Lori Shapiro and OVR staff met with numerous employers, listed below, to highlight inclusive employment and community connections.

    - GET Café
    - VF Corporation
    - Cleanlogic
    - Johnson Matthey
    - Wawa

- PECO
- IKEA
- Aardvark Studios
- Orasure
- Adare Pharma
- Turn5
- Philadelphia Zoo

Service Provision

Annual Performance Summary
2025 was a productive and forward-moving year for the Pathways to Partnership (P2P) initiative. The project continues to strengthen Pennsylvania's statewide transition system by expanding professional training, reinforcing cross-agency partnerships, and preparing for the rollout of key service models in 2026. With foundational pieces now in place, P2P enters the next phase with strong momentum.

Cross-Agency Progress
Collaboration across state partners remains a major strength. Agreements with ODP, PaTTAN, and PA SILC support consistent statewide work and help partners prepare for upcoming implementation. ODP expanded access to Charting the LifeCourse (CtLC) technical assistance, PaTTAN advanced the redesign of the Secondary Transition website for release in 2026, and PA SILC broadened support available to CBI and independent-living partners. These efforts helped to solidify the shared infrastructure needed for expansion.

Growth in CtLC Training
Pennsylvania continues to be nationally recognized for its leadership in CtLC. More than 750 professionals completed CtLC training this year, and staff are increasingly using these tools in case planning, team discussions, and cross-system meetings. Monthly office hours create a steady rhythm of skill-building and support.

Transition Systems Framework Readiness
Sixteen Intermediate Units (IU) have agreed to serve as regional partners for the Transition Systems Framework. The framework will help to bring consistency and stronger data use to transition practices across Pennsylvania.
The timeline for the Framework (July 2026) aligns with implementation of the State Board of Education's revised state academic standards for Career Education & Work Standards, positioning the state well for a coordinated rollout.

Preparing for CBI and WBLE Launch
This year focused heavily on preparing service sites for Community-Based Instruction and Work-Based Learning Experiences. Sixteen sites were confirmed and partners participated in a statewide readiness event where they were provided with a Best Practices Manual. These steps allow hands-on learning in areas such as budgeting, banking, transportation, and employment readiness to begin in 2026.

Evaluation and Data Enhancements
P2P's partnership with Penn State University expanded the project's evaluation capacity. The addition of a "P2P Participant" designation in OVR systems will allow for long-term outcome tracking, and updated surveys will help assess how training influences practice. These improvements will support continuous refinement as services scale.

Looking Ahead
The next three years will focus on statewide implementation. P2P will launch CBI and WBLE services, roll out the Transition Systems Framework across 16 IUs, expand role-specific CtLC modules, and introduce tools aligned with PDE's updated standards for youth ages 10-13. With strong coordination already in place, Pennsylvania is well positioned to expand opportunities for students and deepen person-centered practices across systems.

Evaluation of Education Outcomes

Evidence-based literature consistently identifies key predictors of post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. These include participation in paid work experiences during high school, enrollment in post-secondary education, access to self-advocacy instruction, and involvement in transition planning and services. Furthermore, studies have shown that early, high-quality Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are positively associated with increased employment and education outcomes.

To measure the success of these investments and ensure accountability, OVR is implementing a comprehensive, multi-faceted evaluation plan. This approach leverages both quantitative data and qualitative insights to assess impact and guide continuous improvement. Key components of the plan include:

- **External Evaluation Partnerships**: Utilize evaluation findings from initiatives such as the P2P grant in collaboration with Penn State.
- **Student-focused Tools:** Collect data from standardized transition assessments and customer satisfaction surveys to assess student growth and preparedness.
- **Data Analysis:** Review RSA-911 data and Act 26 reports to monitor service delivery and student engagement over time.
- **Case Reviews:** Conduct both targeted and quarterly case reviews to evaluate service quality and consistency.
- **Provider Accountability:** Develop provider performance summaries or "report cards" to support quality improvement efforts.
- **Staff-level Metrics:** Align individual staff goals with Pre-ETS delivery and outcome benchmarks.
- **Cross-Unit Collaboration:** Partner with the newly formed Systems and Evaluations team and Transition Specialists to design a standardized statewide Pre-ETS performance report. The standardized report will track key

metrics such as employment rate, enrollment in post-secondary training, service delivery, and student engagement in Pre-ETS.

This evaluation plan is intended to support data-driven decision-making, improve service quality, and demonstrate the impact of Pre-ETS on the long-term success of students with disabilities.

PA OVR is required by the Rehabilitation Act to determine a customer's eligibility with 60 days of application for services and to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) within 90 days of the eligibility determination (although there is a waiver process for situations beyond our control). Offices continue to implement OVR's priorities and staff are focused on serving customers effectively through rapid and continued engagement and managing services for both adults and students served in Pre-ETS.

Funding Update

OVR is currently required to invest a minimum of 15 percent of the federal VR grant—an estimated $20 million annually—on Pre-ETS for students with disabilities. OVR will continue to invest resources to ensure that students with disabilities are equipped to enter the competitive labor market. A significant portion of both VR and Pre-ETS funding supports an array of services for students and young adults with disabilities, including post-secondary education, Project SEARCH programs, Supported Employment, and other critical services.

Utilizing Integrated Resource Teams (IRTs) effectively is a primary component of the grant's service/resource coordination focus to accurately identify and deliver necessary support and services to make obtaining and maintaining CIE achievable. OVR has worked with the National Disability Institute (NDI) on training and technical assistance for IRTs. Twelve out of fifteen OVR District Offices received in person IRT Training and are invited to attend monthly technical assistance calls that occur twice per month.

The InVEST Project Team received technical assistance on project measures and adjusted the data accordingly. Prior to the technical assistance, the project team considered anyone referred to OVR from a 14c as a SWTCIE participant; however, the data set was intended to capture enrollment in the project. By utilizing the new measures, 2025 saw a decrease in the number of project participants reported. Facets of the Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS) meant to more accurately capture this data have been modified to help increase participation.

- The percentage of project participants who transition from subminimum wage (SMW) employment to CIE.
    - **0/12= 0%**
- The percentage of project participants who are contemplating SMW employment for the first time but are redirected to CIE.
    - **13/121= 10.7%**

- The percentage of project participants who were at risk of SMW employment but sustained CIE.
    - **3/5 = 60%**
- The number of individuals, excluding students/youths, who have been contacted about the project.
    - **20,810**
- The number of individuals, excluding students/youths, who have been enrolled in the project.
    - **74**
- The number of students/youths who have been contacted about the project.
    - **2,706**
- The number of students/youths who have been enrolled in the project.
    - **64**

Through an MOU with ODP, the InVEST Project is funding training and technical assistance on Charting the LifeCourse Framework & Tools in a cross-systems effort with the Pathways to Partnership Grant. The ODP Grant Liaison funded by the SWTCIE Grant is coordinating efforts with the University of Missouri-Kansas City to increase cross systems training on person-centered planning and resource coordination. The InVEST Project uses the CtLC Framework and Tools as the "map" for person-centered planning and using the Integrated Resource Team model as the "vehicle". Thus far, more than 450 individuals have been trained in CtLC Framework & Tools.

Contracted services continue with Achieva and KenCrest/Community Integrated Services to deliver primary grant services in the western and eastern halves of the state respectively. Both contracted entities are responsible for the delivery of IRT Facilitation and Embedded Employment Supports within a Designated Employer.

- Achieva/WEST
    - 35 IRTs
    - Letters of understanding with four designated employers. (Exceeding original goal by 1.)
        - Sheetz-Claysburg - Bedford/Blair Counties
        - Giant Eagle Northwest PA - Crawford, Erie, and Venango Counties
        - Grandpa Joe's Candy Company - Allegheny County
        - Charley Family Shop n Save Grocery Stores - Westmoreland County
- KenCrest CIS/EAST
    - 50 IRTs
    - Letters of Understanding with three designated employers.
        - Cintas - Four Locations in Emmaus, Northeast Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, and Aston - Lehigh and Philadelphia Counties
        - School District of Philadelphia - Philadelphia County
        - VF Corporation-Jonestown - Lebanon County

The Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) is a post-secondary institution that provides **education and pre-employment transition support services for individuals with disabilities**. In 2024, HGAC announced the launch of an Early Childhood Education **diploma program**. The 12-month program, which started in January 2025, will provide enrolled students with comprehensive training in early childhood development, health and safety, curriculum planning, and more than 480 hours of practical experience working with children. Graduates will qualify for PA Early Childhood Career Pathway entry-level careers. The program is open to individuals with a high school diploma or GED and has a maximum of 10 students per cohort. The program is at capacity for the Spring 2026 term.

In 2025, the OVR State Board voted to adopt a model of *presumed competence*, thus supporting the belief that individuals can make decisions and engage in meaningful activities, including employment-related decisions. This model better allows a customer to maintain an active case and engagement with a VR counselor and work toward an employment outcome. The office plans to have staff trained on the philosophy of presumed competence and upcoming changes, procedural guides and case maintenance by early January 2026. Additionally, OVR updated the referral and application language to reflect rapid engagement procedures and functions to better serve Pennsylvanians seeking employment.

YORK COUNTY

Pennsylvania
Department of Labor & Industry
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

MEET KATHIA CRUZ-ORTIZ

In 2017, Kathia Cruz-Ortiz, who has muscular dystrophy, opened a case with the York Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS). At that time, she had no work experience and wasn't sure what kind of employment suited her abilities. Through counseling and guidance from her vocational rehabilitation counselor, along with psychological testing conducted by Behavioral Healthcare Consultants, she was able to assess her strengths and identify her desire to pursue a career focused on helping others. As of October 2023, Cruz-Ortiz has been successfully working full-time as a caseworker at the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS).

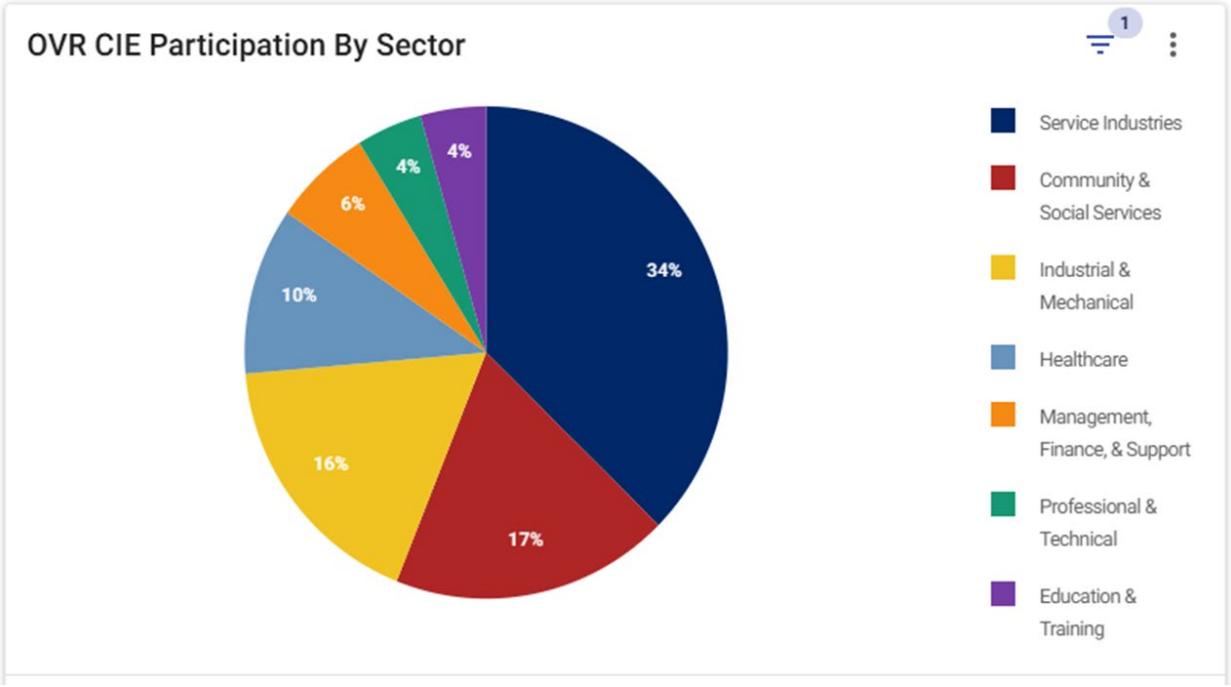
Cruz-Ortiz credits OVR for starting her journey to employment and independence. Throughout her post-secondary education, she received financial support from OVR for four years while attending Penn State University – York Campus, where she studied human services. Additionally, she was provided with assistive technology devices to help her succeed in college.

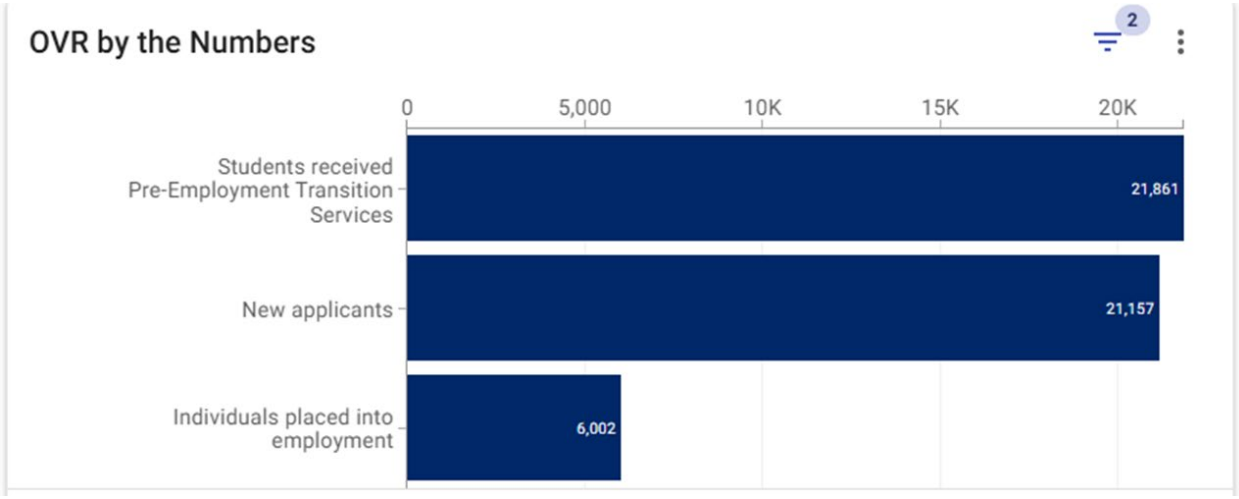
After completing her degree and securing a job, Cruz-Ortiz received assistance from OVR to purchase a new power wheelchair. She also underwent driver's training at Brant's Driving School while staying at OVR's Commonwealth Technical Institute at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (CTI at HGAC) and obtained a modified van from Total Mobility Harrisburg, allowing her to transport herself to work.

For Cruz-Ortiz, having a job means she can be independent. Looking back on her employment journey, she encourages individuals with disabilities to be persistent and not give up.

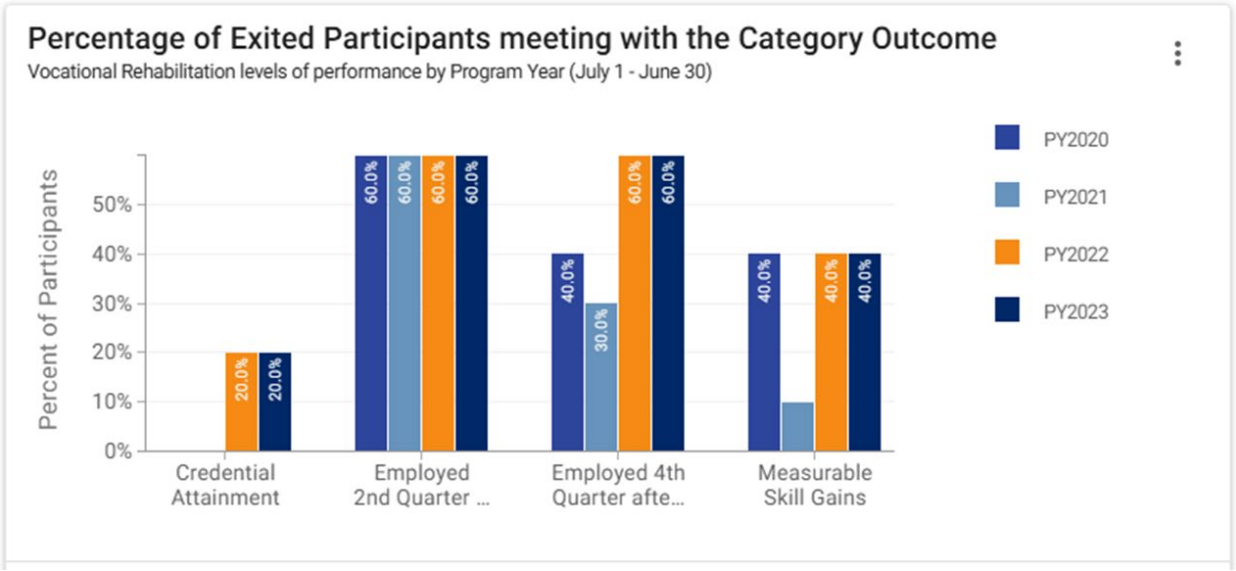
"For someone with limitations, we have to go ten steps further to achieve our goals, but in the end, it's worth it," said Cruz-Ortiz.

Data Snapshot[3]





[3] "Percentage of Exited Participants" chart provided by the Pennsylvania Office of Administration Enterprise Data Office.



Department of Human Services

DHS is committed to helping Pennsylvanians with disabilities to be a part of an inclusive community that they deserve. Supporting opportunities to work is an important part of building inclusion and fostering independence and empowerment. Employment services are embedded across the Medical Assistance (MA) program through the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL), and the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS).[4] DHS works with people covered through MA to understand how they can work and pursue goals without jeopardizing access to necessary services and supports.

Benefit Coordination: Medical Assistance Benefits

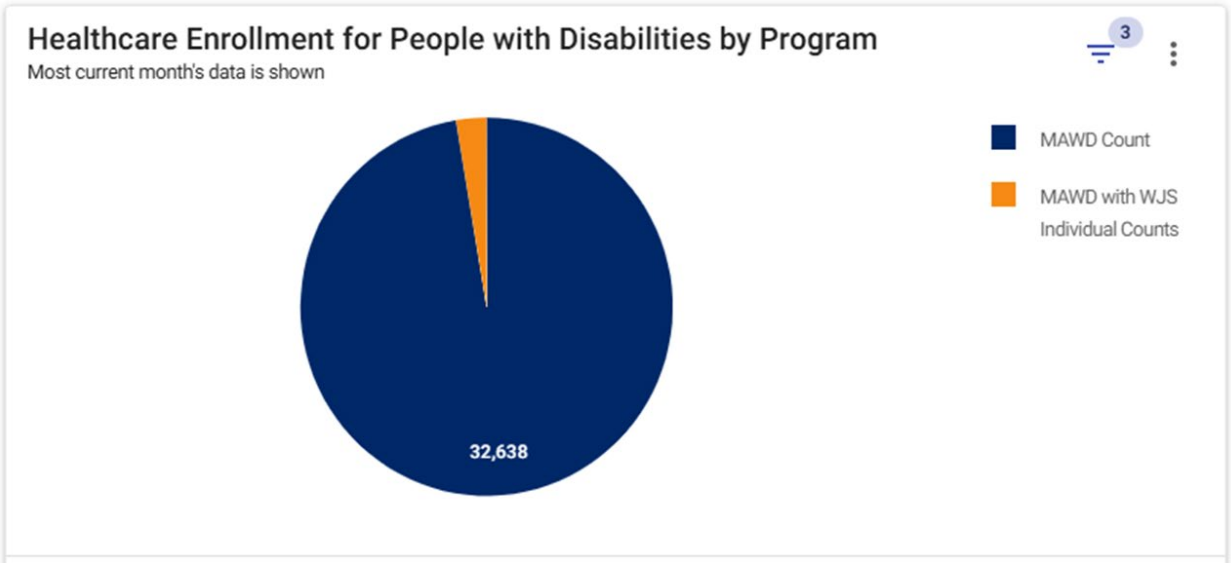
Individuals with disabilities often have unique medical needs requiring secure and adequate coverage for healthcare services. **Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities** (MAWD) is a program that provides healthcare coverage for people who have a disability and are working. To be eligible for MAWD, an individual's countable income must be below 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and they must have less than $10,000 in countable assets.

A common concern related to achieving CIE is that an increase in wages and savings could result in losing benefits that individuals need. The **MAWD for Workers with Job Success** (MAWD:WJS) is a relatively new benefit that enables an individual to retain their MAWD benefit by paying a higher monthly premium to retain MAWD coverage for essential healthcare services. MAWD:WJS is for eligible individuals with a disability who make between 250 percent and 600 percent of the FPL. The premium that an individual pays is unique to their income and assets. Some individuals pay approximately 7.5 percent of their countable income whereas

[4] For more on OMHSAS, see the "Other Agency Initiatives" section.

others pay the full cost premium, which is $948 per month. Due to lack of awareness of the MAWD and MAWD:WJS programs, OLTL hosted a public presentation, "Maintaining Home and Community-Based Services while Working/Earning Income," which detailed the MAWD program during the November 12, 2025, Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) subcommittee meeting. In addition, OLTL has regularly discussed MAWD with Community Health Choices (CHC) MCOs, ensuring that they are educating their service coordinators on this who in turn can assist their participants with accessing this benefit.

Data Snapshot



**As of September 2025*

Benefit Coordination: Home and Community-Based Services

OLTL

DHS administers programs to address needs related to the ability of an individual to live in independent and community-based settings. Services and supports that enable individuals with disabilities and older adults to live independently include home and community-based services and supports, such as direct support and attendant care, transportation, home and vehicle modifications, and employment services.

Primarily, OLTL oversees programs that provide home and community-based services, such as **direct care and attendant care**, which are critical services some individuals with disabilities need in order to work. In CHC, these services are arranged by and paid for via MCOs. For the first time, the 2024 CHC agreement included a **pay for performance incentive to MCOs** to increase the number of individuals 21-64 years old who are employed. This incentive is also included in the 2025 and 2026 agreements. To receive incentive payments, MCOs are required to

reach a target of 2.5 percent of individuals aged 21-64 receiving services and participating in the workforce in a CIE setting. Imposing a 2.5 percent minimum performance metric could result in doubling the number of individuals enrolled in OLTL services and participating in CIE.

For individuals aged 21-64 served by CHC in 2022, there were 615 participants with CIE. In 2025, the number of participants increased by 69 percent to 1,041. There is still significant progress to be made because this only represents a small percentage of CHC participants.

OLTL is monitoring the impact of the pay for performance measures for the CHC-MCOs. These pay for performance measures are designed to encourage the CHC-MCOs to incentivize employment outcomes. In 2024, AmeriHealth Caritas Pennsylvania and Keystone First launched an upside-only Employment Services Value-Based Incentive Payment Program for employment services providers to promote employment retention. AmeriHealth Caritas presented this program at the March Long-Term Services and Supports subcommittee meeting.

Through the AmeriHealth Caritas Pennsylvania and Keystone First program, employment services providers may receive an incentive payment of up to $10,000 for each participant who helped to become employed and who remained employed for 6 or more months. AmeriHealth Caritas and Keystone First ended 2024 with 504 employed home and community-based services participants: of those participants, 465 meet CIE criteria as outlined in the CHC Agreement. As of March 2025, AmeriHealth Caritas and Keystone First reported that they have achieved more than 29 percent growth in CIE since January 2024.

ODP

ODP provides **supportive services for Pennsylvanians with intellectual disabilities and autism** to achieve greater independence and opportunity. ODP is implementing **performance-based contracting** for residential services to incentivize service providers to connect individuals with CIE and related supports.

In 2025, the first year of implementation of performance-based contracting for residential services, ODP distributed the first round of Pay for Performance (P4P) milestone payments. To receive the P4P Employment Milestone 1 payment, residential service providers were required to submit a plan to increase CIE for working age individuals in residential programs. Out of 166 residential services providers that submitted plans for improving employment outcomes, 126 (or 76 percent) met the requirements to receive the payment. Early data also indicates that performance-based contracting is contributing to positive employment outcomes for individuals receiving residential services. From January to August 2025, the statewide percentage of individuals enrolled in either the Consolidated or Community Living waivers who both receive residential services and have CIE increased from 10 percent to 11 percent. Additionally, on average, residential service providers serve individuals with higher acuity needs. The rate of individuals

with CIE who also receive residential services exceeds ODP's statewide average for employment when adjusted for acuity level. In September 2025, ODP released updated Residential Performance-Based Contracting Performance Standards for Contract Year 2026-2027 that included updates to the performance measures related to CIE. Progress continues to be made in the number and percentage of employed people aged 18-64 enrolled with ODP. As of September 2024, there were 8,358 individuals served in ODP home and community-based programs. From September 2018 to September 2024, there was a 36 percent increase in persons being competitively employed (increase of 2,208 people).

In April 2025, ODP announced it was accepting public comments on proposed changes to implement performance-based contracting for Supports Coordination services in the Consolidated, Person/Family Directed Support (P/FDS) and Community Living Waivers as well as Targeted Support Management. The proposed changes were available for public comment until May 26, 2025. In October 2025, ODP received approval from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for an amendment to a 1915(b)(4) Selective Contracting waiver to add Supports Coordination Organizations (SCOs). Performance measures include requirements for SCOs to develop a plan for improving CIE; demonstrate tracking employment related data and outcomes for individuals; and accurately report information related to CIE to ODP. In 2026, SCOs can also qualify for P4P milestone payments by demonstrating an increase in the percentage of individuals with CIE from baseline 2025 data. The proposed changes to the waivers are scheduled to take effect January 1, 2026.

Both OLTL and ODP are working to increase CIE for people with disabilities through contracting provisions. ODP has the performance based contracting provisions that are being implemented for residential services and supports coordination, which are described in more detail above. OLTL has pay-for-performance measures in the CHC MCO contract that are being monitored to determine effectiveness.

OLTL has been working with the CHC MCOs on the creation of a direct care worker (DCW) **online portal** for participants in the self-directed model of care to be able to search for available DCWs in their area. The CHC MCOs have selected a vendor to implement a DCW/Participant matching registry known as DCC or Direct Care Careers. The tool was launched in September 2025. The following is a snapshot of utilization numbers as of November 24, 2025:

Direct Care Careers Program Statistics:

- 164 Employer Profiles
- 368 DCW Profiles
- 91 Job Posts

BLAIR COUNTY

Pennsylvania
Department of Labor & Industry
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

MEET MICHAEL BAKER

In 2018, Michael Baker was preparing for his final year of high school, and came to OVR's Altoona Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for help achieving his dream of becoming an architect. Baker began working with his OVR counselor, Kirsten Shahmoradi, to overcome the employment barriers he faced from autism, ADHD and anxiety. While still a student at Altoona Area High School, he took part in OVR's pre-employment transition services to get ready for college and work.

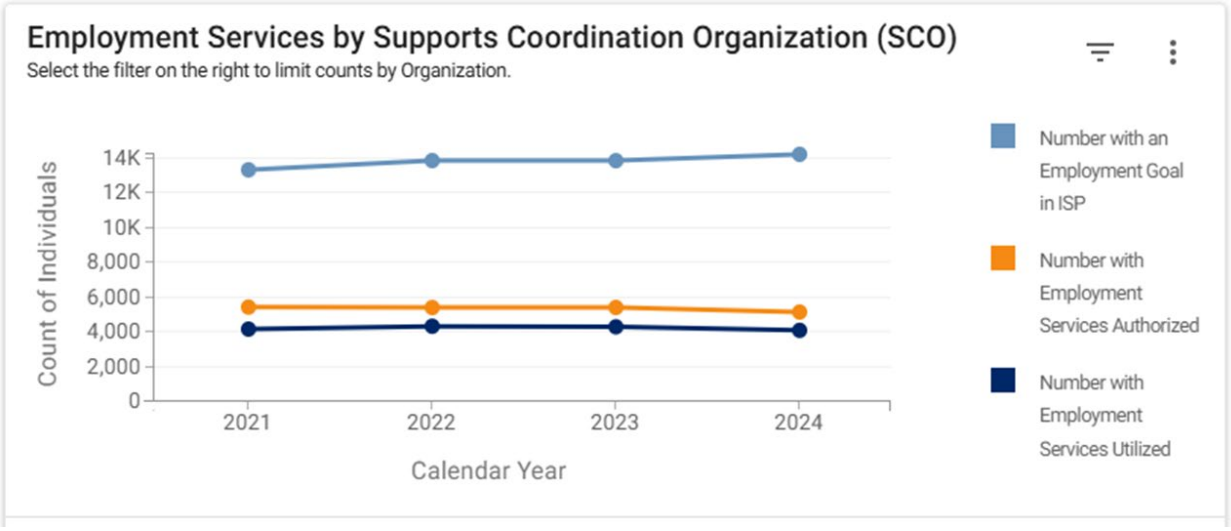
After graduating high school, Baker enrolled at Penn State University. While studying at Penn State, he continued to work with his OVR counselor, mental health therapists, and the disability services office at the university. Graduating from college wasn't easy: Following his first year at Penn State, Baker withdrew from classes due to academic struggles and briefly attended Indiana University of Pennsylvania as a music major. With the support of his parents, Baker transferred back to Penn State in 2022 to major in education, with hopes of becoming a social studies teacher. In 2024, he graduated with a bachelor's degree in education. Baker's supervising counselor at OVR, Kristie Sharer, played a key role in helping him graduate. He also credits his late great-grandfather, his role model who passed away in 2017, as a reason for his success.

After graduation, Baker was offered a position as a high school history teacher with the Mount Union School District. He says the best part of his job is working with students. As for the future? Baker will begin his master's program at Villanova in Fall 2025!

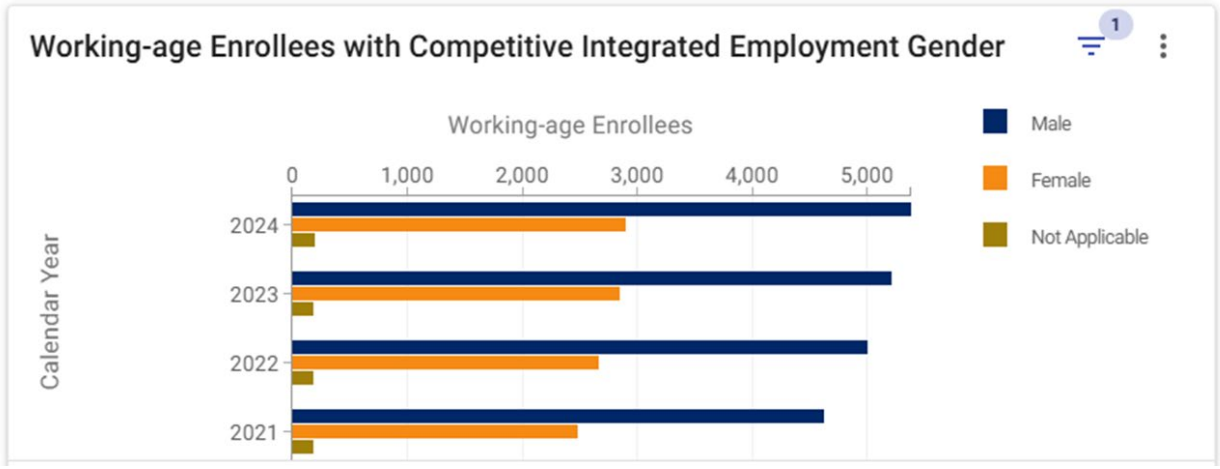
When asked what advice he would give to other students with disabilities who are considering pursuing post-secondary education, Baker encourages them to "be your own self-advocate" and always ask for advice. "The worst [thing] they can say is 'no.'" Congrats Michael!

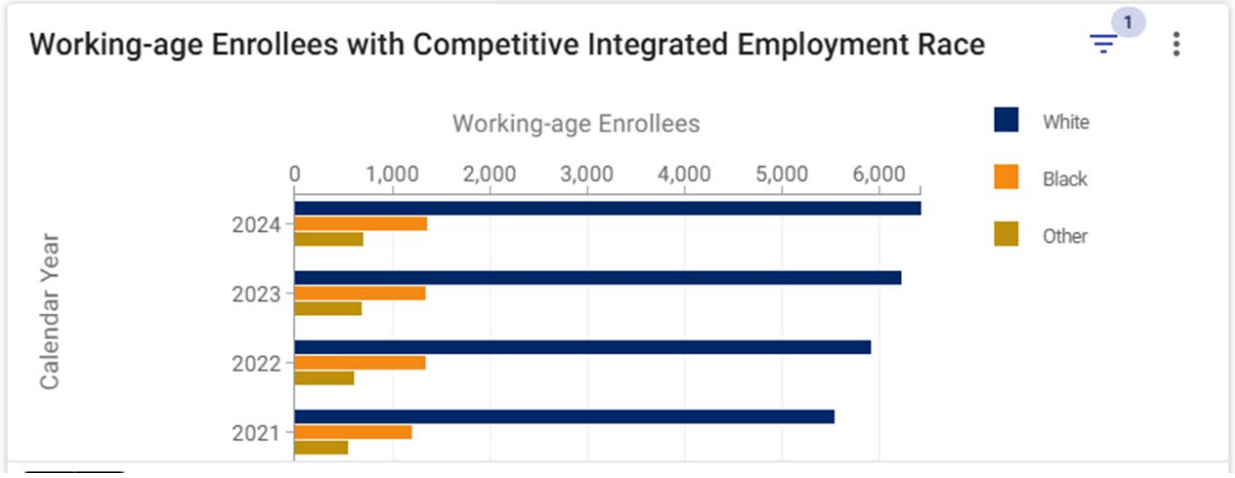
The Shapiro Administration led the effort to secure $280 million in the 2024–2025 budget to **increase hourly wages for direct support professionals** and a $74.8 million infusion to **clear the emergency waitlist** for ODP's waivers so that more Pennsylvanians can get the care they need. As of August 31, 2025, 3,213 individuals age 21 and over were on ODP's emergency waitlist, a number that continues to decline as all counties are actively enrolling additional adults into home- and community-based services. Since the announcement of the ODP Multi-Year Program Growth Strategy in February 2024, the list has been reduced by 28 percent. The list prioritizes individuals who have a need for services within six months for enrollment in available waiver slots.
The 2025–2026 budget includes $21 million designated to increase DCW salaries. This investment includes a wage increase and increases access to affordable insurance for approximately 8,500 workers.

Data Snapshot[5]



[5] Both charts provided by the Pennsylvania Office of Administration Enterprise Data Office.





To help people transition from positions paying subminimum wage to competitive integrated employment, OVR and ODP held a listening session during the ODP Information Sharing Advisory Committee (ISAC) meeting in April 2025 to gather input from the disability community, providers, and other stakeholders on the eventuality that subminimum wage will end. ODP also collaborates with OVR to implement the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant Subminimum Wage to Competitive integrated Employment (SWTCIE), known as Project InVEST in PA. InVEST will connect individuals who may be considering or are currently participating in subminimum wage employment to consider and pursue competitive integrated employment through a variety of collaborative and innovative solutions that build supports around the individual and the employer.

DHS submitted a joint comment with L&I on a proposed federal rule[3] that would stop issuance of new section 14(c) certificates and phase out existing certificates over several years. DHS and L&I are generally supportive of the proposed rule and recommended a five-year phase out to allow adequate time to create new services, train providers on national best practices, and ensure collaboration between state agencies, community rehabilitation providers, and employers.

Modifying the licensing structure to limit subminimum wage activities is not the fastest or most effective way to pursue the EFOC's goal of eliminating the subminimum wage in Pennsylvania.

The majority of Pennsylvania's counties reported employment as a need in their County Human Service Plans of FY25-26. OMHSAS plans to address this need in 2026 by conducting quarterly meetings with county employment specialists that will identify and address challenges and obstacles that are impacting employment services in the counties and lead to possible solutions that will help increase access to employment services. It allows OMHSAS to be aware of employment services currently available and aware of issues/challenges/improvements that are occurring in the counties to aid in directing OMHSAS's focus on employment services.

Department of Education

While PDE does not directly provide services or benefits, PDE administers state level policy, regulations, and standards that pertain to special education services in Pennsylvania via the Bureau of Special Education (BSE). PDE developed the Learning Institute for Kindergarten-2nd grade Classroom Teachers to ensure inclusive practices begin at a young age. Regular education Kindergarten-2nd grade teachers were provided with training in a "Make and Take" model with tools and resources to create inclusive classrooms. This program supports the premise that inclusion can provide students with disabilities with the support needed to be employed in a CIE setting if educated in less restrictive settings in school.

In 2025, PDE networked transition consultants funded through the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act, beginning with the Connecting for Employment event in the summer and continuing throughout the year. The Connecting for Employment time was spent reviewing state and regional data to develop regional strategic plans related to transition. The teams were trained in CtLC, a framework which supports students and families in identifying meaningful life outcomes in inclusive settings, to implement at the local level. The next networking event, which will occur in April 2026, will focus on "Promoting Healthy Relationships and Boundaries for Students with Disabilities," based on the ElevatUs training that has been used throughout the past year.

At the 2026 PDE BSE Conference, PDE will highlight mini businesses established by Student Shoppe Vendors involved in the secondary transition process. The Student Shoppe offers students an opportunity to expand their work skills and broaden their understanding of marketing, advertising, and sales involved in the secondary transition process.

PDE maintains a PA Secondary Transition website, which was expanded to include the PA Public Square, an interactive backend platform that functions like a learning community/social media for those in secondary transition. PDE's monthly

newsletter, entitled "Transition Tidbits," highlights best practices and current news in the field of transition. Transition Tibits averages over 1,500 views per issue across the state, nation, and even some in Europe. This year the website will have improved user experience and accessibility features as well as an interactive state resource map and an employer toolkit. The Current Events Calendar is updated by PDE and Partners of Transition Events.

PDE developed a three-year state plan, **Secondary Transition Community of Practice (CoP)**, during the 2023 NTACT: Capacity Building Institute. Goals of the plan include increasing the youth engagement footprint in Pennsylvania and increasing the number of students with disabilities that are completers of career and technical education programs. New CoP goals will be set in February 2026 and will be based on Employment First goals for consistency. The CoP is leveraging Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) **Youth Engagement Specialists** (YES) to work with OVR to increase the number of Youth Ambassadors in the state; they increased the number from one to 12. YES led **Attract, Prepare, and Retain (APR) Learning Institute for Transition Consultants** across the three PaTTAN offices with more than 300 participants statewide.

The Bureau of Career and Technical Education (BCTE) and PaTTAN have partnered to fund three CTE consultants at the PATTAN system. New CTE PaTTAN publications will be released in 2025-2026. PaTTAN will pilot the use of the Framework for Access and Belonging (FAB) in Career and Technical Centers (CTCs). The CoP will partner with PaTTAN and BCTE to pilot a cohort of staff to be trained as FAB facilitators starting in January 2026. The CoP is also expanding early transition planning next year through a middle school subcommittee and developing a middle school learning institute during the summer of 2026.

Also, through PaTTAN, PDE offered an online professional development course, **Work Based Learning: A Guide for Program Implementation**, for teachers, transition coordinators, and special education administrators. There is now a Schoology Course, Transition Consultant Playbook, to be used when onboarding new Transition Training and Consultation (TaC) team members for consistency in practices.

This past summer's "Bridging Knowledge to Know How Conference" featured sessions specific to transition from high school to adult living and the youth experience during transition. PaTTAN consultants meet monthly to discuss Indicator 13, Indicator 14, Transition System Framework, embedding Youth Engagement, and other effective practices across the state.

Lastly, the Student-Led IEP (SLIEP) Resource Hub on the PaTTAN website is a one-stop shop for youth, families, and schools/educators at any stage of readiness to engage youth more meaningfully in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. The hub is embedded into the PA Secondary Transition website for easy access. SLIEP is a cross-systems initiative, which promotes youth voice in transition

planning, offering tools and training to empower students to lead their meetings and shape their futures.

DELAWARE COUNTY

Pennsylvania
Department of Labor & Industry
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

MEET FREDDY SHEGOG

Frederick "Freddy" Shegog began services in 2017 with OVR's Norristown Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, when he was struggling with mental health and substance use disorder challenges. When he started OVR services, he was residing at a homeless shelter that referred him for assistance and support. Through hard work and continuity of care from multiple agencies and support systems – including mental health treatment, housing services, sobriety support groups, and OVR – Freddy was able to face and overcome the challenges associated with homelessness, securing and sustaining employment, maintaining sobriety, and a past criminal record. He also successfully pursued and obtained his driver's license and graduated college.

Freddy and his OVR counselor worked on goal planning and vocational counseling/guidance, including necessary student loan management steps. He also received educational training and financial assistance towards earning an associate and bachelor's degree. Additionally, OVR provided comprehensive diagnostic psychological evaluation and vocational evaluation services , as well as resource counseling to assist Freddy in learning how to operate his own business.

In May 2020, Freddy's hard work and dedication paid off. He earned an associate's degree in communication arts from Delaware County Community College, and in 2022, received a Bachelor of Arts degree in communication studies from West Chester University. During this time, Freddy was involved in a college student project with legislators and former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf and his wife, former First Lady Frances Wolf, to end food insecurity on campuses.

In 2023, Freddy started his motivational speaking business. He delivers speaking engagements across the country, and completed his first national tour in 2024. But Freddy's accomplishments don't stop there.

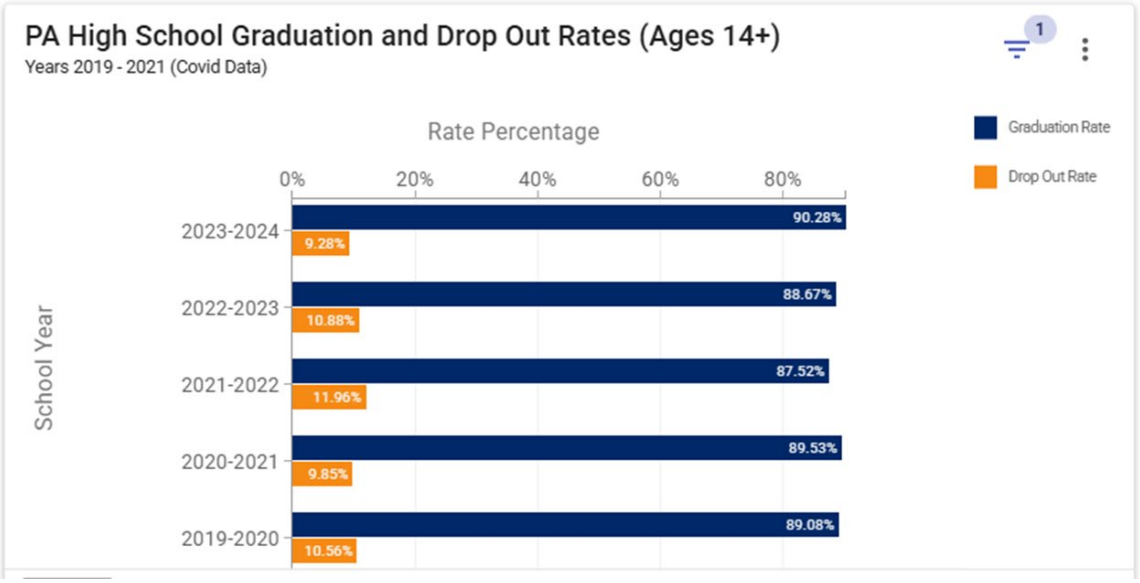
He also participated in a documentary of his life filmed by Temple University and is writing a book about his transformational journey to recovery and success.

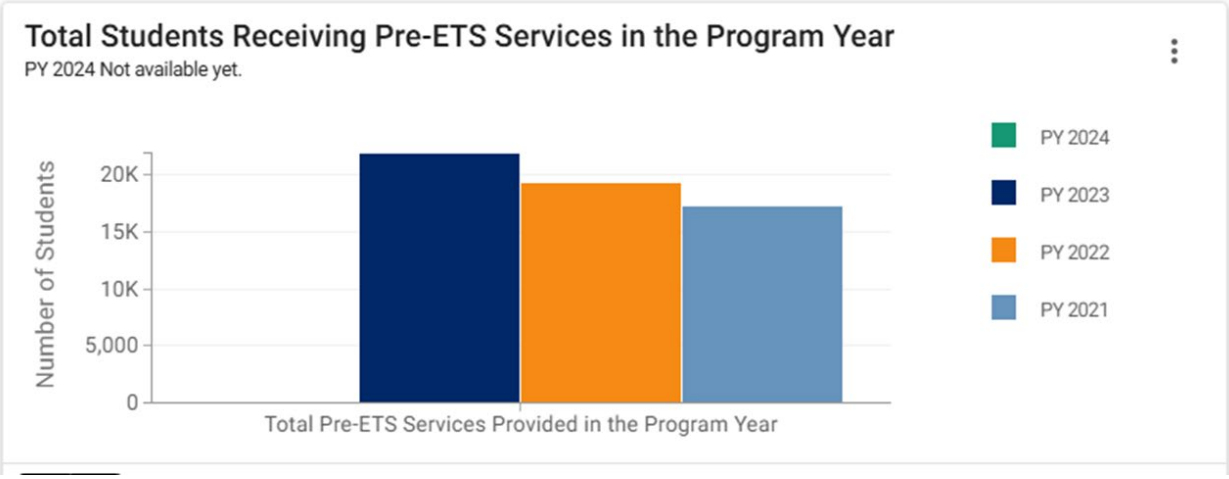
Although a successful businessman now, Freddy remains grounded in his humble beginnings and always remains thankful to those who helped him along his way.

"I look back to where I was when I started working with [his VR counselor]," said Freddy. "I was living in a shelter, just out of jail, and if it weren't for your kindness, I wouldn't be here. I want to thank [my OVR counselor] for [her] kindness."

Data Snapshot

The Federal Office of Special Education Indicator reporting indicates positive graduation and dropout rates. The 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 data should be interpreted with caution but overall show a 2.9 percent increase in graduation rate and 2.7 percent decrease in dropout rate over the past six years.





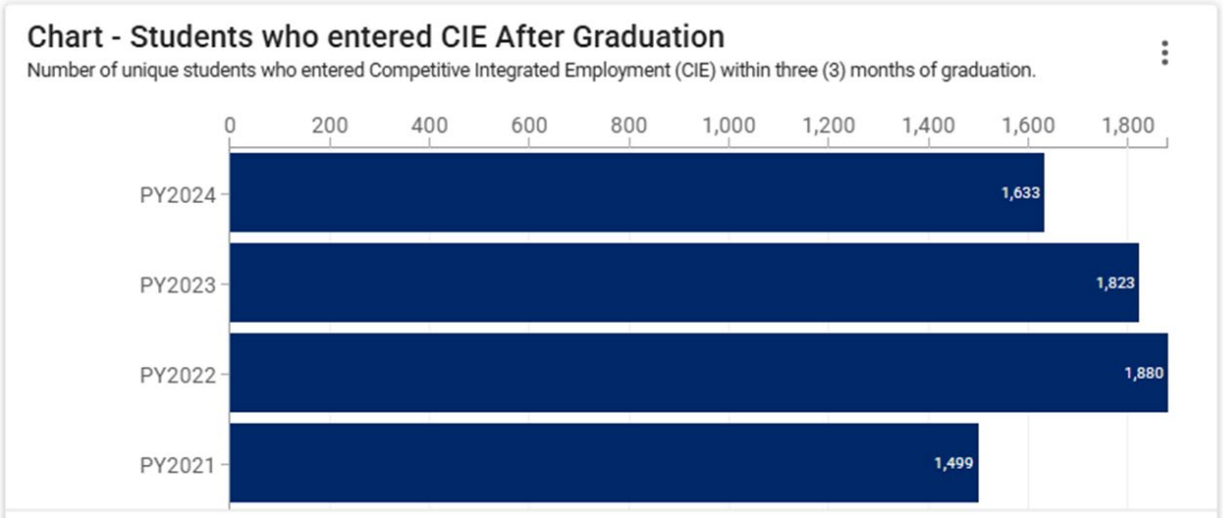
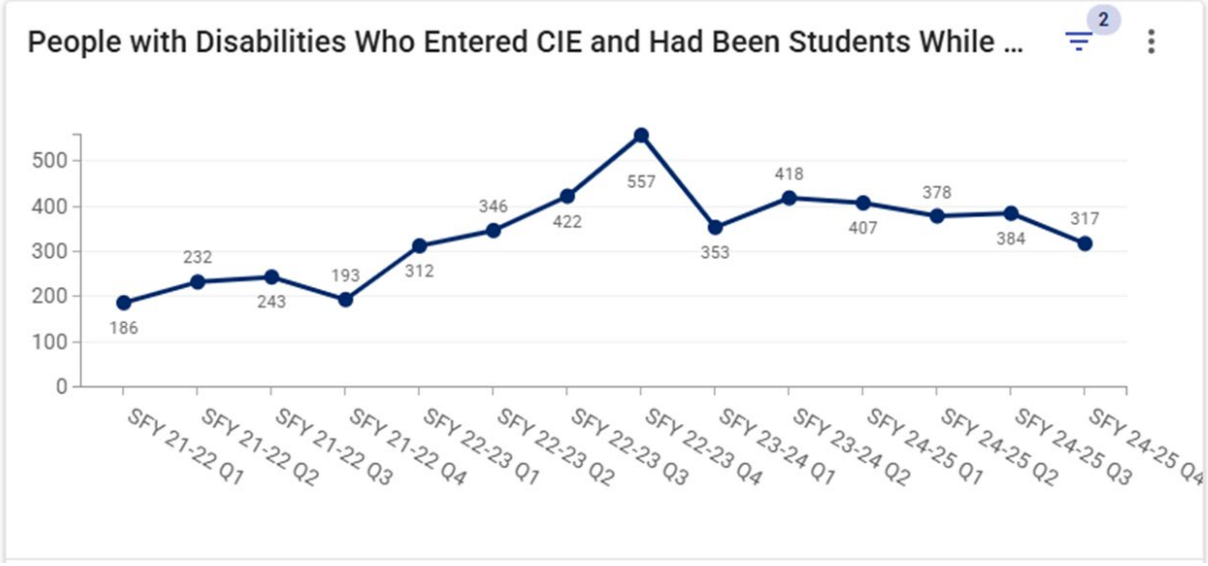


Chart - Students who entered CIE After Graduation
Number of unique students who entered Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) within three (3) months of graduation.
0
200
400
600
800
1,000
1,200
1,400
1,600
1,800
PY2024
1,633
PY2023
1,823
PY2022
1,880
PY2021
1,499


People with Disabilities Who Entered CIE and Had Been Students While ...
2
500
400
300
200
100
0
186
232
243
193
312
346
422
557
353
418
407
378
384
317
SFY 21-22 Q1
SFY 21-22 Q2
SFY 21-22 Q3
SFY 21-22 Q4
SFY 22-23 Q1
SFY 22-23 Q2
SFY 22-23 Q3
SFY 22-23 Q4
SFY 23-24 Q1
SFY 23-24 Q2
SFY 24-25 Q1
SFY 24-25 Q2
SFY 24-25 Q3
SFY 24-25 Q4

Department of Corrections

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) is a newer addition to the Employment First Cabinet, joining in the summer of 2024 as a participating, non-member agency. DOC has multiple programs designed to serve justice-involved individuals with disabilities. Using a mix of state and federal funds, DOC offers the following reentry services to assist these individuals: housing assistance, mentoring, workforce development, family reunification, day reporting, outpatient mental health treatment, outpatient behavioral programming, and the State Drug Treatment Program. DOC partners with 101 different providers offering services at 234 locations across the state.

DOC offers a robust workforce development program, providing vocational training and on-the-job training in a multitude of disciplines and actively engaging with employers in the community, highlighting the benefits of hiring justice-involved individuals who are returning to the community. Incarcerated individuals with disabilities are integrated into all aspects of the workforce development program.

DOC's **Neurodevelopmental Residential Treatment Unit** (NRTU) at State Correctional Institution Albion is one of several specialized units DOC operates across the state. The NRTU specializes in addressing the unique rehabilitative needs of inmates diagnosed with intellectual and developmental disorders, including autism spectrum disorder. The unit has a dedicated parole agent, offering tailored reentry services; adaptations to the unit environment to reduce external stimuli; and evidenced-based specialized programming to help individuals with social skills (via the proven PEERS program). Residents of the unit can obtain employment to develop a variety of skills in preparation for reentry. Other DOC specialized units, located throughout the state, tailored for people with disabilities include Personal Care, Skilled Care, Special Needs, Therapeutic Community, Intermediate Care, Forensic Treatment, Intermediate Treatment, Mental Health, Residential Treatment, and Neuro Cognitive Care.

Department of Community and Economic Development

DCED's Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) and NAP Special Program Priorities (SPP) programs may be utilized to fund projects pertaining to the advancing independence and employment for individuals with disabilities. Funding for both NAP and NAP SPP was increased in the Administration's bipartisan FY 2024-25 budget. DCED's Manufacturing PA Training to Career may be utilized for projects to increase career training for individuals with disabilities.

In 2025, DCED hired a Director of Historically Disadvantaged Business Assistance that will work with business assistance centers to provide technical assistance for owners of historically disadvantaged businesses, which may include businesses that are owned by individuals with disabilities.

V. Accessibility

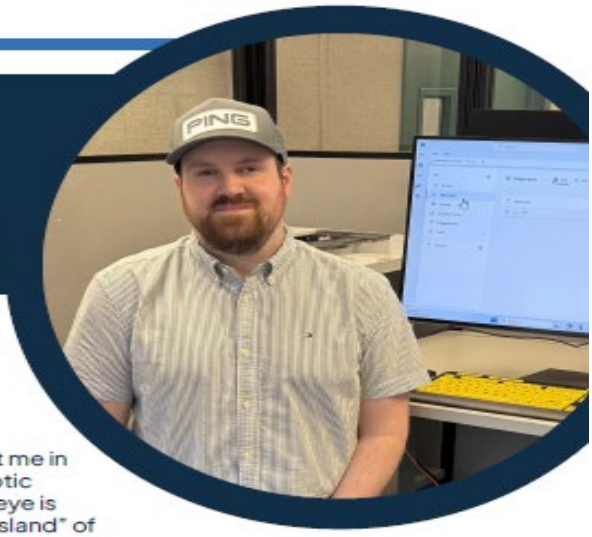
State government services, resources, and physical and digital property should be accessible to all Pennsylvanians regardless of disability status.

To address physical accessibility, the Administration has completed an **accessibility study of the Pennsylvania Capitol Complex**, a direct result of the Governor's HIRE Executive Order (2024-01). The Department of General Services completed a comprehensive site and building accessibility study in June 2025. DGS hired a Philadelphia-based architectural firm, Voith & Mactavish Architects, to complete this first-ever report intended to improve accessibility allowing Pennsylvanians with limited mobility, visual impairments, and other considerations to visit and participate in state government functions at the Capitol Complex. A $15M capital construction project will begin in January 2026 to make the East Wing accessible from all routes and the main public entrance to the Capitol. Construction is expected to begin in October 2027 and be completed in February 2029. The capital project includes improvements from Commonwealth Avenue to the East Wing entrance to parking areas, pedestrian access, (2) entrance elevators, sidewalks, ramps, stairs, and signage.

CUMBERLAND COUNTY

Pennsylvania
Department of Labor & Industry
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

MEET BRENTON MORRISON



"I love working with people that are so passionate about helping others," said Brenton Morrison, a fiscal assistant at OVR's Harrisburg Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services (BBVS).

In 2019, Morrison, 25, says his life changed.
"I had several strokes due to high blood pressure which left me in really bad shape. The strokes stopped blood flow to my optic nerves and caused me to lose my vision. Currently, my left eye is totally black, and my right eye is the same except for one "island" of vision in my outer right periphery," he explained.

This caused severe disorientation, loss of balance and deteriorated motor skills. Prior to vision loss, Morrison was thriving – he ran his own auto detail shop and was a first responder in his community.

Eventually, Morrison wanted more. He was introduced to BBVS. A social worker came to his house and made sure he felt heard and understood with the help of JAWS, a screen-reading software. Then, Morrison completed OVR's low vision evaluation. His goal was to work again; he was transferred from the Specialized Services program for adults to the Vocational Rehabilitation program – where he received vocational counseling, low vision services, and orientation and mobility training.

In 2021, orientation and mobility training was Morrison's bridge back to feeling like himself. With the help of an orientation and mobility specialist, Morrison walked to Starbucks, which included a complex street crossing. From truncated domes, to revolving doors, escalators, and crowded areas, the specialist played a key role in rebuilding Morrison's skills and confidence.

In 2024, Morrison began working as a local office fiscal assistant with OVR's Harrisburg BBVS Office. To be successful, OVR provided magnification accommodations and a specialized monitor.

"I am now proud to say with all the services and connections I had through OVR, I am a permanent full-time employee for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," said Morrison. "I have a very rewarding and fulfilling job that makes me feel normal. I have accommodations that allow me to work like everyone else! OVR was vital for recreating my life."

Staff Shoutouts: Nannette Seidenberg, Orientation & Mobility Specialist (former); Anjie Cruz, Social Worker; Justin Christopher and Fredericka Roseborough, VR Counselors (former); and Ruth Lotz, Assistant District Administrator

The Administration is prioritizing improving digital accessibility across Commonwealth services to ensure equitable access for all Pennsylvanians. By engaging real-world testers, we create more inclusive digital solutions that meet the needs of everyone. These insights are essential to designing services that work better for residents and reflect the Administration's commitment to meaningful accessibility improvements, as Brenton Morrison explains above.

In addition, state agencies, including the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Transportation (PennDOT), as well as the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA), a nonprofit governed by a board appointed by the Governor, have key roles to play in increasing accessibility.

Department of Health

DOH facilitates the **Special Kids Network**, which assists providers and parents of children and youth with special health care needs with accessing local services and supports. Special Kids Network serves children and youth with physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional needs from birth through age 21.

One of the recommendations of the Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC) was that the Department of Health (DOH) establish goals to increase the hiring of individuals with disabilities within healthcare and public health roles, and to further address social determinants of health and health inequities through its programs and initiatives. DOH has taken steps to implement this recommendation through the following actions:

- Raising Awareness: DOH participates in job fairs and publicly posts public health positions to recruit eligible and qualified candidates, including individuals with disabilities.
- Providing Training to Staff: DOH provides ongoing, inclusive training opportunities for all staff, including training on disability awareness and etiquette, as well as disability management.
- Supporting Programs: DOH supports the Special Kids Network and its efforts to assist healthcare providers and parents of children and youth with special health care needs in accessing local services and supports.

Department of Transportation

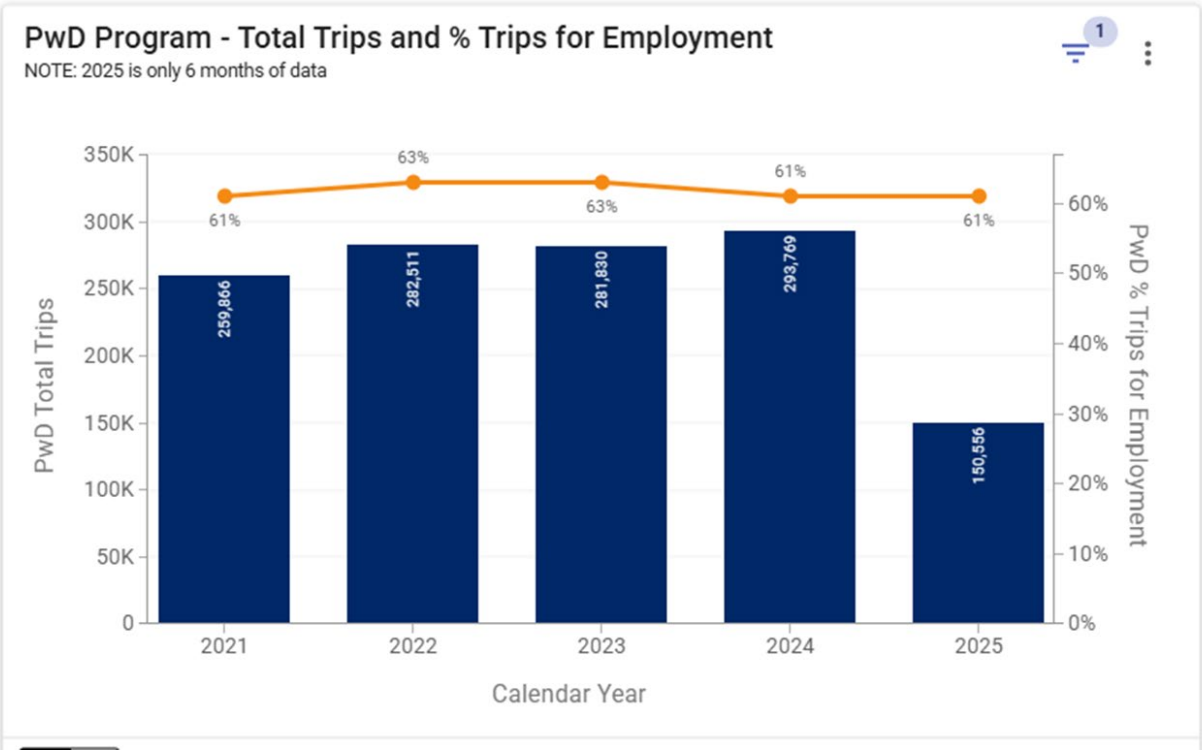
PennDOT works with county transit agencies to improve the overall outcomes for its **Rural Transportation Program for Persons with Disabilities** (PwD). The PwD program is for individuals who live and/or travel outside any local fixed-route system and its Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit service. Through this program, people with disabilities aged 18 through 64 may

receive reduced rates on shared-ride, curb-to-curb, and advance reservation transportation services. In 66 out of 67 counties (Philadelphia is not included due to its extensive ADA service), people with disabilities pay a portion of the regular fare and the PwD program pays the remainder of the fare for trips that are not eligible for any other funding source. The majority of PwD program trips transport people to and from work, with the percentage of total program trips for an employment purpose remaining in the 61-63 percent range per year over the past few years.

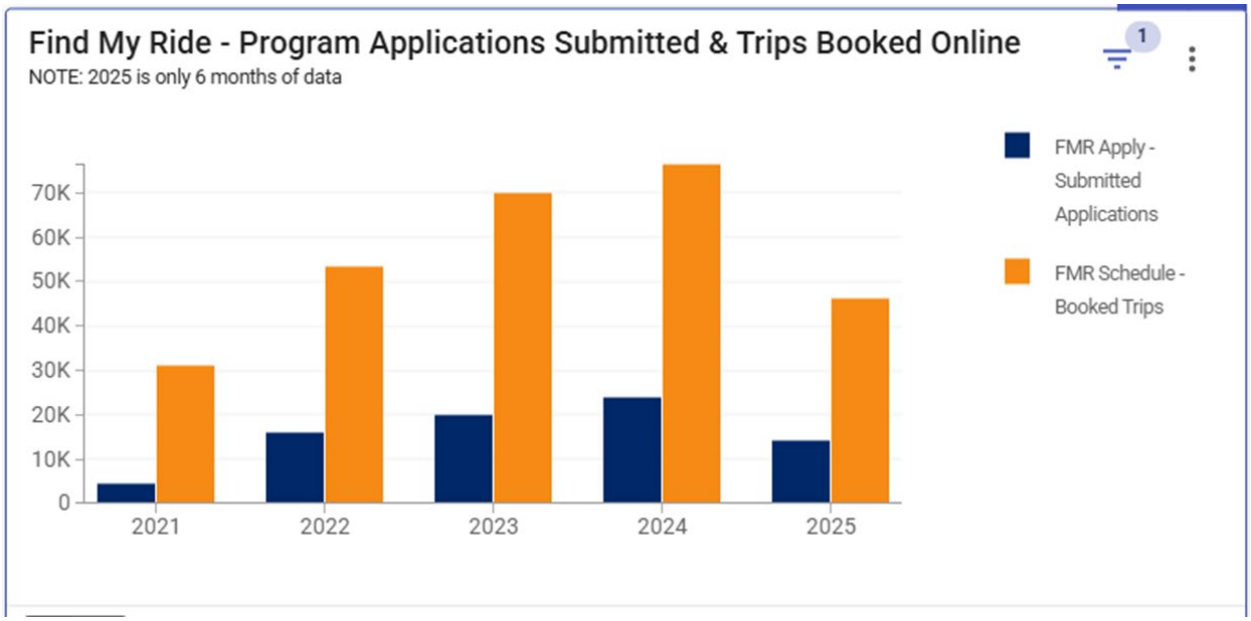
PennDOT's **Find My Ride** website complements programs like PwD by providing a single online resource that summarizes public transportation services and by offering contact information for the transportation providers that operate these services by county. Find My Ride also allows people to apply for transportation programs online and to book, cancel, or review shared-ride trips online. By offering an online option to supplement, rather than replace, the existing offline means of accessing and using transportation services, Find My Ride makes them more accessible overall.

Data Snapshot

This chart shows the total number of PwD program trips completed in each calendar year from 2022 through 2024 and the first six months of trip data for 2025. Total trips have remained steady, with a slight increase from 2023 to 2024, and the first six months of 2025 a bit higher than the first six months of 2024. The chart also shows the percentage of total PwD trips taken for purposes relating to employment. This percentage has also remained steady, with a bit over 60 percent of all PwD program trips being for a work-related purpose each year.



This chart shows the annual count of online program applications submitted and shared-ride trips booked using Find My Ride from 2022 to 2025. Both Find My Ride services continue to see growth each year, with 2025 counts of submitted applications exceeding 25,000 and online trip bookings exceeding 90,000, despite not including any information for December. These counts include applications and trip bookings for other programs in addition to the PwD program.



Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency

The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) offers an online **housing search tool** that provides the ability to search by accessibility needs for those with disabilities. PAHousingSearch is a free resource to help buyers find a home that fits their needs and budget. Property providers also can list available apartments or homes.

VI. The Commonwealth as a Model Employer

On May 13, 2024, Governor Shapiro signed Executive Order 2024-01, which established the **Hire, Improve, Recruit, and Empower (HIRE) Committee** and set strategic direction for the Commonwealth to establish inclusive practices. Membership of the HIRE Committee includes the Executive Director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation or designee. The Executive Order specifically states that the purpose of the group is to ensure that "the policies and programs of the Commonwealth [serve] as a model for other employers in the Commonwealth and as such, the Commonwealth's policies should reflect its position as a model employer."

The Office of Administration (OA), Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Department of Labor and Industry (L&I), Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), and Department of State (DOS) have made significant progress in intentionally creating new processes to make the Commonwealth's employment systems to be more inclusive of individuals with disabilities.

Office of Administration

The Office of Administration (OA) is responsible for human resource functions for agencies operating under the Governor's jurisdiction within state government. OA has been engaged with other Cabinet and non-Cabinet agencies to ensure that employees with a disability have the resources needed to be successful in their Commonwealth employment. Some examples include: the Bureau of Enterprise Recruitment (BER) with the Bureau of Organization Management (BOOM) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEOO) **promoting accessible position descriptions and essential functions** and **providing training for agencies** on writing these; creating and presenting Disability Awareness Trainings to all human resources managers under the Governor's jurisdiction; and coordinating the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) internship program statewide.

The OVR Internship Program offers college students with disabilities valuable work experience in state government. OVR refers qualified students and supports both interns and host agencies throughout the process, while OA coordinates agency placements, training, and events. Students apply and interview for internships, and placements are based on their interests, skills, and agency needs to ensure a meaningful match.

This summer, 10 students participated in the 10-week program, working in agencies such as the Department of Health (DOH), Department of General Services (DGS), Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Department of Human Services Office of Long-Term Living (DHS-OLTL), Department of Labor and Industry (L&I), Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), OA, OVR, and the Center for

Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA). Interns gained real-world experience through projects like organizing events at the Governor's Residence, developing surveys and micro-learnings, supporting eLearning workshops, and helping agencies with data collection and process improvement.

The program kicked off on June 6 with a welcome from L&I Executive Deputy Secretary Bill Trusky, OVR Executive Director Ryan Hyde, OA Secretary Neil Weaver and Deputy Secretary for HR Jason Swarthout. On July 14, Governor Josh Shapiro and First Lady Lori Shapiro hosted the interns, their agency supervisors, OA and OVR Executive Teams, and other dignitaries at the Governor's Residence to honor their contributions. The program concluded on August 8, 2025.

While the smaller intern class does not meet the goal to increase participation, it has resulted in important improvements to the OVR intern program. The smaller class size has allowed BER to build more developmental and networking opportunities into the program. These include sessions on professionalism, resiliency, time management, critical thinking, conflict resolution, and interview preparation. Additionally, OVR Counselors are able to participate in the program this year by meeting with assigned interns and their supervisors to provide a more direct approach to student learning and success. Counselors can also assist with identifying student strengths, obstacles, and goals.

Additionally, OA was actively working with agencies to implement a **pilot program in partnership with OVR to refer qualified individuals receiving OVR services to frequently posted Commonwealth jobs**. This pilot began in August 2024 with DMVA. Unfortunately, in 2025, no OVR customers were successfully hired into the targeted DMVA vacancies. There were 54 DMVA requisitions that were forwarded to OVR Counselors for referral of their customers. Only 21 OVR customers applied to these vacancies with just eight interviewing. The pilot cannot be expanded to other agencies as originally planned until issues with the job-readiness, interest, and availability of OVR candidates are resolved.

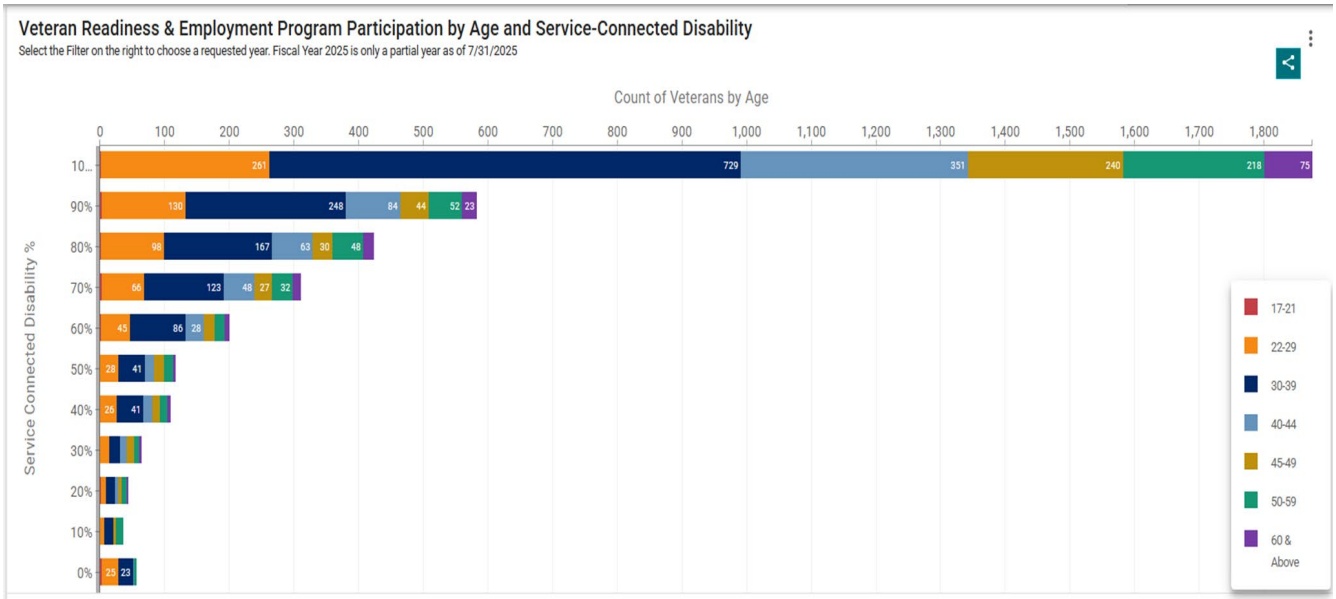
The OA Bureau of Enterprise Recruitment has continued to work with OVR, L&I, and DMVA to improve the pilot program. In July, BER staff and DMVA hiring managers participated in an in-person training program at Fort Indiantown Gap presented by OVR leadership. The training focused on disability awareness and supports available from OVR for employees with disabilities. Additionally, there were discussions with the hiring managers about the needs of the facilities related to the targeted job titles, and with the recruitment team regarding recruiting efforts and application procedures. Out of that training came monthly meetings with DMVA and OVR to discuss feedback on the pilot program and suggest areas for improvement. Additionally, site visits to the DMVA facilities were scheduled from August through November for both OVR and BER staff. The purpose of these visits is to provide a greater understanding of the job environment where OVR customers would be employed, and to present information to the on-site managers about employee

supports provided by OVR and recruitment and hiring processes from BER's perspective. Three very successful site visits were conducted in August and September. Those scheduled for October and November were postponed until early 2026 due to the budget impasse and travel restrictions.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

DMVA **focuses on hiring individuals with disabilities.** DMVA works with an OA disability recruiter to encourage candidates with disabilities to apply for DMVA state employment. OVR disability counselors can help candidates find DMVA positions. While making progress towards this initiative continues, there have been challenges because the data regarding veterans with disabilities in Pennsylvania is housed at the federal Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition, DMVA will be scheduling disability awareness training for HR staff and hiring managers within the agency.

Data Snapshot[6]



The DMVA HR Office is working with OA and BER to coordinate regional meetings with DMVA and OVR to explain the OA-DMVA pilot program, the nature of the work in State Veterans Homes, the application, and the hiring process in hopes of gaining more interest in the pilot.

[6] "Veteran Readiness & Employment Program Participation" chart provided by the Pennsylvania Office of Administration Enterprise Data Office.

Department of Labor & Industry

In addition to service provision, OVR within L&I works closely with other state agencies and local partners to promote the accessibility of state resources to individuals with disabilities.

OVR and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) entered a MOU to increase opportunities for high school students up to age 25 to participate in paid work experiences in PA state parks and DCNR-managed state forests through the **PA DCNR Outdoor Corps**. The DCNR Outdoor Corps Youth Employment Program offers paid work experience, including skills training, professional development, and hands-on environmental education experiences through exposing participants to a variety of professional and career paths while working to complete recreation and conservation projects on PA's public lands. For high school students participating in the year 2026 program, the hourly pay for the summer Outdoor Corps is $17.31 an hour for up to 37.5 hours a week for the six weeks. The program duration is from June 29 to August 7, 2026. For young adult, post-secondary, or career tech grads participating in the seasonal nine-month Outdoor Corps, the hourly wage is also $17.31 for up to 37.5 hours a week from March 30 to November 25, 2026. The youth program, which includes an American Sign Language Youth Crew, typically has 10-12 high school participants each summer. The young adult program for ages 18-25 spans nine months and is a gateway to professional training, development, and growth opportunities.

MY Work (Municipalities + Youth) is a summer employment program created by OVR to provide high school students with disabilities the chance to work within their local municipalities. The program started with 50 students. During the most recent program year, OVR placed 403 students with disabilities at 97 worksites across 57 Pennsylvanian counties. OVR covers the program's wages for all student workers, with no cost to the municipality. Additionally, OVR has developed work readiness guidance in a variety of fields, including beautification projects, children's programming, and customer service. As OVR's presence becomes more established in these localities, more employers, educators, and community members become aware of OVR's services. By partnering with municipalities and nonprofits, OVR builds local connections and raises awareness of its mission to support employment for people with disabilities, reaching both urban and rural communities across Pennsylvania. In 2025, Governor Shapiro accompanied L&I Secretary Walker to visit a Lancaster City Park in Manheim Township. This high-level support has increased the visibility of OVR's mission and strengthened our ability to make employer connections across the state.

OVR in collaboration with the Office of Developmental Programs have submitted comments to the Notice of Proposed Rule Making regarding the phase out of subminimum wage employment nationally. In solidarity with the State Workforce Board, the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation also voted to recommend to the

governor to phase out subminimum wage strategically over a period of time. The Department of Labor and Industry also submitted a joint letter with the Department of Human Services, suggesting a five-year phase-out. OVR and ODP have also recently held a listening session during the ODP-ISAC meeting in April to gather input from the disability community, providers, and other stakeholders on the eventuality that subminimum wage will end. OVR in partnership with OPD and BSE are also working to implement the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant Subminimum Wage to Competitive integrated Employment (SWTCIE) – known as Project InVEST in PA. InVEST will connect individuals who may be considering or are currently participating in subminimum wage employment to consider and pursue competitive integrated employment through a variety of collaborative and innovative solutions that build supports around the individual and the employer.

At the May 2025 State Workforce Board meeting, it was discussed that "OVR continue suggesting recruitment processes for employers, targeting career ladders and pathways, and supporting workers" financial needs, unique aspirations, and talent succession, among others. Disability inclusion training can help facilitate meeting these goals.

Department of Community and Economic Development

Aiming to be a model employer, DCED includes personnel from its **Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion (DEBI) office** on interview panels when appropriate. DCED also met with staff from OVR's **On-the-Job Training** (OJT) program to discuss DCED participation in the program and discussions continue. OJT provides opportunities for qualified OVR customers to enter employment. The OJT program reimburses a percentage of an OVR customer's wages to absorb some training costs. OVR offers technical support and certification of additional business tax credits when employers hire qualified, job-ready OVR customers.

DCED provided training to OVR staff to provide assistance and tools that OVR staff may utilize when providing assistance to individuals with disabilities that are interested in starting businesses.

SCHUYLKILL COUNTY

Pennsylvania
Department of Labor & Industry
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

MEET
BRETT AND HENRY STEHR

Brothers Brett and Henry Stehr manage a large, well-known family farm in Schuylkill County – Kenny Stehr & Sons Farm. They have been working on the farm since teenagers and each care for different fields. Brett manages the vegetables and Henry oversees the fruit. Their farm hosts a variety of festivals for the community throughout the year, such as the Peach Festival in the summer, Apple Fest in the fall, and Winter Fest. The farm also has a store featuring food and pastries, along with an ice cream shop. Brett and Henry have dedicated their entire working lives to this farm, and continuing in the family business is of utmost importance to them.

Recently, the brothers have been experiencing more difficulty managing the large farm. On top of orthopedic issues sustained from years of farm work, Brett also had some cardiac concerns, and Henry was experiencing hearing loss.

They learned about OVR through AgrAbility, a project designed to assist farmers and other agricultural workers with disabilities or long-term health conditions by providing the resources and support they need to live independently and to continue working in or return to production agriculture.

In 2024, the brothers opened their cases with OVR's Reading Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS). OVR's Hiram G. Andrews Center's Center for Assistive and Rehabilitation Technology (CART) in Johnstown, PA, completed assistive and occupational therapy evaluations for them at their farm. During occupational therapy evaluations, Gators with attachments and a snowplow were recommended.

OVR worked with the brothers to fund the equipment, and the Gators, snowplow, and the recommended attachments were delivered in early January 2025. The equipment will allow both Brett and Henry to access the expansive fruit and vegetable farm. After being evaluated for his hearing loss, Henry received hearing aids, funded by OVR, allowing him to improve his interactions with vendors at their farmer's market.

Brett and Henry are thrilled to be able to continue to work on their family farm. As a result of their positive experience with OVR, the Stehr brothers are interested in becoming a possible site for pre-employment transition services, where students involved with OVR can participate in paid work experiences and job shadows. OVR wishes continued success to Brett and Henry and looks forward to partnering with them in the future!

Department of Corrections

All DOC employees complete disability training and management-classified employees and supervisors complete additional training. DOC is working to create an online training on OVR services and Employment First for targeted staff. The target audience will include social workers, corrections counselors, guidance counselors, principals, parole agents, and facility employment coordinators. DOC expects this to be in place by March 31, 2026.

Department of State

As an Employer, The Department of State will work with the Office of Administration (OA) to post external job postings on one job board aimed at individuals with disabilities. As a regulator of private employment in professional licensing, DOS will report all data on accommodations that are utilized by initial licensure applicants and license renewals and use this information to reduce barriers to entry. DOS will create a working group to explore ways to best be prepared to employ individuals with varied disabilities and needs. The group will work with OVR to set up at least one streamlined pathway to licensure for individuals with disabilities.

VII. Other Agency Initiatives

Commonwealth agencies represented in the Cabinet are making progress towards incorporating Employment First principles in agency operations and programs. Success can be attributed to the Administration's prioritization of Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) and workforce goals and to agencies' strategic planning and office- and bureau-level foresight and initiative. Additionally, agencies have made progress in cross-department collaboration and enhancement, rather than duplication, of efforts.

Department of Human Services

In 2025, the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) prepared to hold its third annual series of regional **employment symposiums**. Through a collaboration with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation's Business Services Division, ODP conducted outreach to business and employers to raise awareness of the benefits of employing individuals with disabilities. As a result of these outreach efforts, ODP had the highest business community engagement rate for these events to date as demonstrated by an increase in the number of employers registering for all four symposiums. ODP hosted the first symposium in Harrisburg, PA in September. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing Pennsylvania state budget impasse, ODP was forced to cancel the remaining three symposiums. The in-person symposiums offered tangible opportunities for networking, sharing resources, and learning best practices for employer engagement. The symposiums were designed to facilitate authentic dialogue about increasing employment rates for people with disabilities.

In 2025, ODP released a third year of **county specific data related to CIE**, employment services, and employment evaluated by race. These data are intended to provide additional insights into county programs to both identify any existing racial disparities and develop strategies to address identified disparities. The 2025 reports expanded data on CIE to include acuity level and a three-year comparative dataset to assist counties in evaluating long-term employment strategies and initiatives.

The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (OMHSAS) has made an amendment to the Medicaid State Plan for Peer Support Services to broaden the eligibility criteria for the Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) workforce. The update eliminated the previous requirement of a serious mental illness diagnosis, instead adopting a more inclusive standard that requires only a mental health diagnosis. This change enables a greater number of individuals in recovery to qualify as a CPS. Reflecting the effects of these changes, the Pennsylvania Certification Board reported as of October 2025 there were 3,480 individuals with an active Certified Peer Specialist certification in Pennsylvania, an increase of 670 over January 2025.

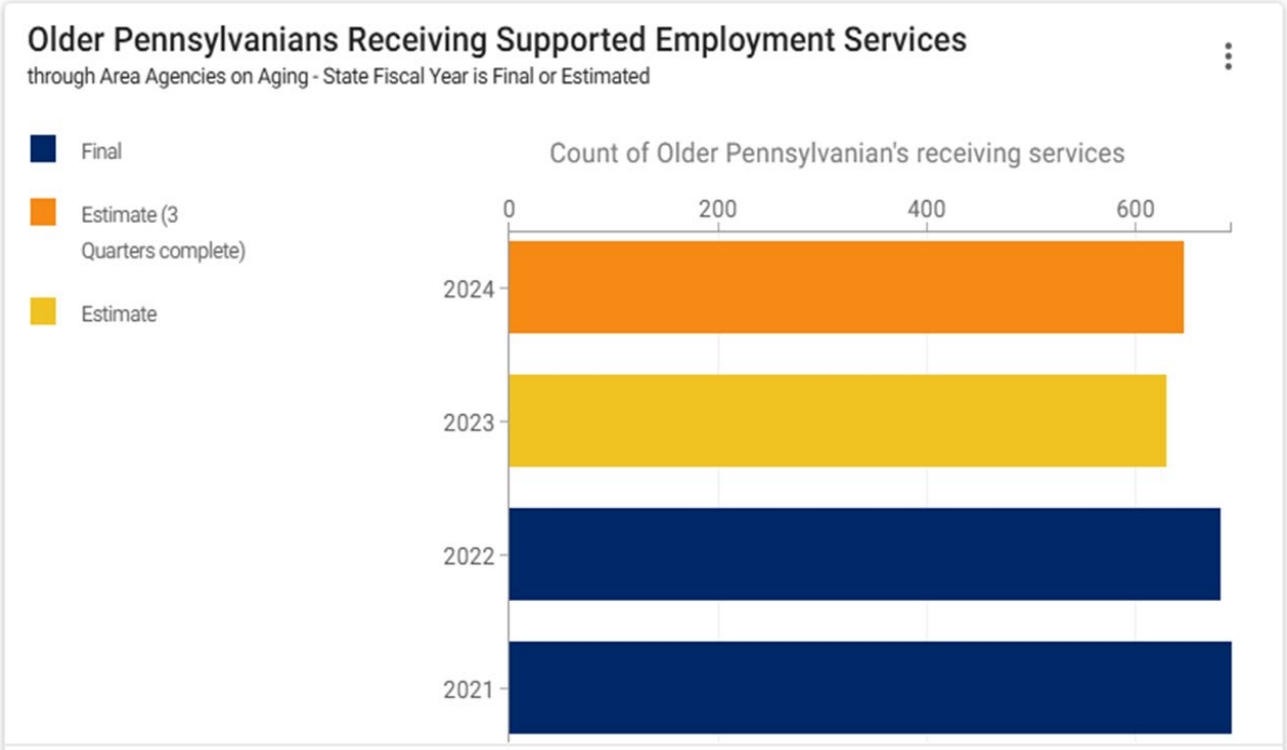
To further support this expansion of the workforce, OMHSAS is working with the Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Pennsylvania Peer Support Coalition (PaPSC) to implement the Bridge Program, which is funded by a Transformation Transfer Initiative (TTI) grant through 2026.

As of January 2026, OMHSAS has added Certified Recovery Specialist (CRS) to the Bridge Program along with the current focus group of Certified Peer Specialist (CPS). The Bridge Program is a mentoring program designed for individuals with criminal justice involvement, including both recent reentrants and those with previous justice system involvement, who were previously certified as a CPS or CRS. The program connects participants with experienced mentors and provides guidance, encouragement, and resources to help them prepare for roles as CPSs and CRSs in the community. By focusing on mentorship and support as individuals move from incarceration into behavioral health work as peer or recovery specialist, the program aims to strengthen reentry outcomes and reduce rates of recidivism.

Department of Aging

In 2024, the Department of Aging (PDA) released Pennsylvania's first multisector plan on aging, Aging Our Way, PA. This document is a 10-year strategic plan to improve systems of support for older adults and caregivers. The plan includes tactics to help older adults find accessible work opportunities to maintain employment as they age. PDA is in the implementation phase of the plan now. Also, PDA is collaborating with the Bureau of Workforce Partnerships and Operations to define PA CareerLink filters that may support older adult employment interests and develop a guide on how to apply those filters. In addition, PDA is currently in the process of evaluating the PA Link and developing a plan to refresh and improve the program. The PA Link Refresh Plan is currently available for public comment until Monday, February 9th Recommendations will include expanded information for employment opportunities. Upon completion of the redesign, PDA will collaborate with community partners to promote the PA Link as a central hub for employment information.

Data Snapshot



Department of Health

DOH developed a multi-year strategic **State Health Improvement Plan** in collaboration with diverse stakeholders across the state, focusing on equity and addressing social determinants. The overall goal is to improve the health and life expectancy of all Pennsylvanians and eliminate health equities by focusing on whole person care and chronic disease prevention.

DOH's **State Health Assessment** (SHA) examines **inequities** by disability in access to information, accommodations, access to transportation, healthcare providers' competencies to treat people with disabilities, and access to health care and health insurance. The SHA also assesses impact of social isolation on mental health and individuals living with disabilities.

Developmental Disabilities Council

The Developmental Disabilities Council (PADDC) creates a new **State Plan** every five years that includes "actions and strategies that will lead to more meaningful, inclusive, and self-directed lives for people with developmental disabilities." Two of the plan's objectives focus on employment: 1) through peer-to-peer training, increase the number of people with developmental disabilities who state they make

decisions for their own lives and 2) support 20 businesses each year through education and technical assistance focused on practices to employ/promote more people with developmental disabilities.

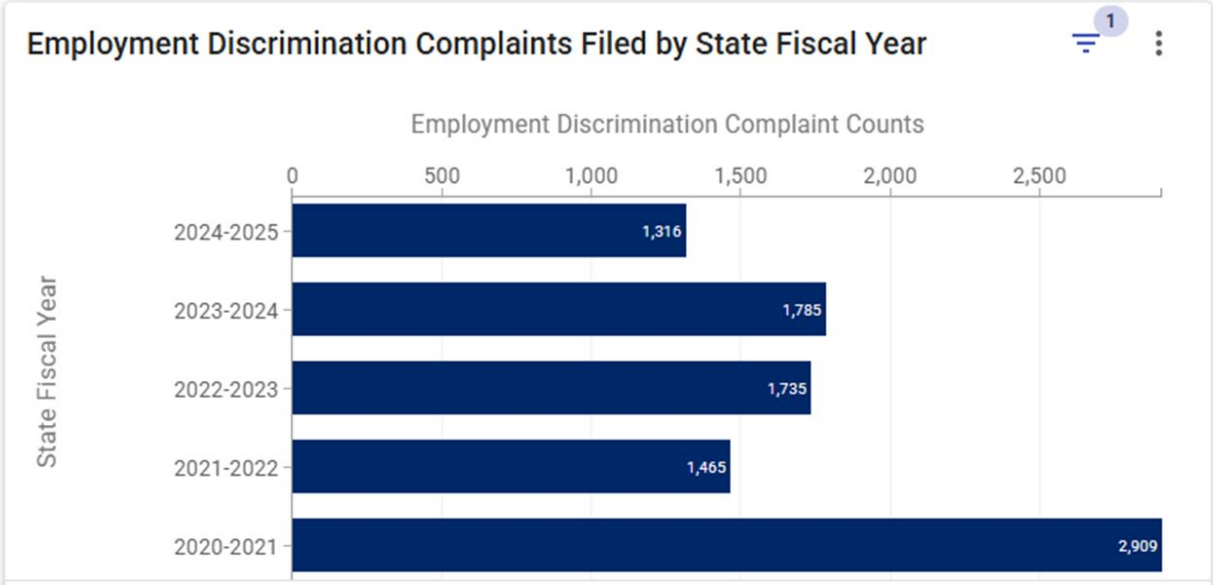
PADDC **funds new and innovative short-term projects** that help people with disabilities to participate more fully in their communities. Our employment projects organized job fairs for people with disabilities, provided educational sessions for employers about supported employment services, and provided resources on recruiting, hiring, and ADA accommodations to business owners. In addition, PADDC supported two employment conferences in October 2025, planned by collaboratives of Employment First Coalitions covering 13 counties in the central and eastern regions of PA. The Eastern Conference kicked off National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) on October 1, 2025, and the Central PA Conference wrapped-up NDEAM on October 29, 2025.

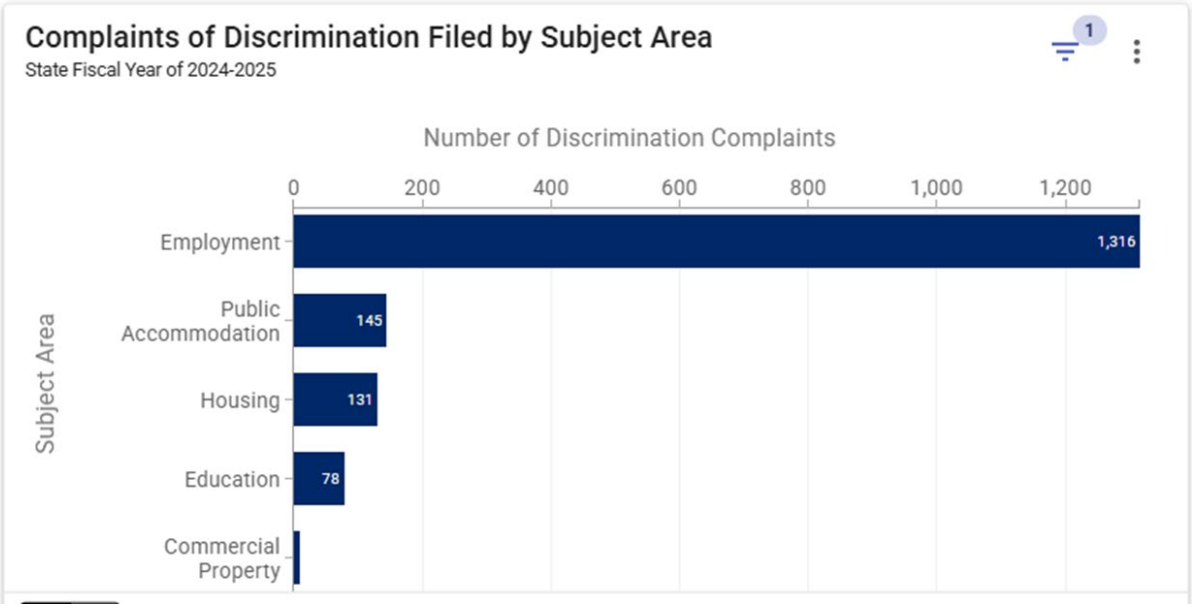
Human Relations Commission

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) focused its Employment First efforts on **public awareness** of the protections afforded to individuals with disabilities through training, informational pamphlets and posts, and strategic litigation. The aim is to drive more individuals to the agency to exercise their right to be free from discrimination on the basis of disability. Employment discrimination already vastly outpaces the discrimination that PHRC hears about in other areas of protection.

Public awareness activities included hosting PHRC's **Third Annual Disability Conference** in July and two "Lunch and Learns" focused on autism and neurodivergence. PHRC also issues pre-hearing and post-hearing **press releases**, which may involve disability rights litigation, to educate the public. In addition, 18 counties have PHRC **Social Justice Ambassadors**, who advocate for social change for individuals with disabilities and others. PHRC aims to have one in every county. Ambassadors refer education, employment, housing, commercial property, or public accommodation discrimination complaints from community members to PHRC and keep PHRC updated on incidents of hate and bias in their communities.

Data Snapshot[7]





[7] Both charts provided by PHRC.

Cross-Agency

OVR and the Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services (BJJS) entered into a MOU in May 2017, in effect until June 2026, to better serve justice-involved youth with disabilities. Internal OVR staff provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and accept referrals for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services. VR Specialists provide technical assistance to OVR staff, Pennsylvania Academic, Career, and Technical Training Alliance (PACTT) partners, PACTT affiliates, and complete reporting to BJJS. (The PACTT Alliance is part of BJJS.)

DOC has had several strategy meetings with OVR to enhance their partnership in assisting reentrants with disabilities obtain CIE upon release. They are working to streamline and expand the DOC to OVR staff-assisted referral process. This process, currently used by field parole agents, would expand to inside State Correctional Institutions with the goal of having the applicant assigned an OVR case manager and an OVR application initiated prior to release from incarceration. Both agencies have established workgroups and met to determine appropriate inmate/customer screening questions and other specifics to train DOC Staff on OVR referrals, in achieving a desirable employment outcomes with inmate skills training received, securely transferring and retaining customer data, and process steps to ensure this population is served beneficially within PA. OVR has completed a specific DOC to OVR referral form, a resource account where the forms can be sent for OVR processing, and also an OVR training specific to DOC staff in their Learning Management System (LMS).

The DOC in conjunction with OVR, is working to develop systems to track the following: number of DOC staff who complete the OVR/Employment First training; number of OVR referrals through DOC staff; number of referrals that resulted in an open case/actual appointment with OVR; and number of open cases that ultimately led to employment. DOC expects completion of this by March 31, 2026.

PennDOT met with OVR to discuss the Driving with Bioptics Program, identifying several opportunities for improvement: refining the online practitioner lists (PennDOT and L&I); evaluating the potential to improve reimbursement rates for participating providers (L&I); and evaluating options for increasing the number of providers.

DCED cooperated with OVR to provide training to Partnerships for Economic Performance (PREP) and Engage! program recipients, who represent over 100 economic development organizations across the Commonwealth, on ways to increase CIE for individuals with disabilities. Also, DCED trained OVR staff on tools they may use when providing assistance to individuals with disabilities who are interested in starting businesses.

VIII. Response to Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC) Report

The Cabinet would like to thank EFOC for continued collaboration and their thoughtful annual report, submitted in October 2025. Of the broader cross-agency recommendations that EFOC put forward, the following best efforts will be made to:

- Increase competitive integrated employment (CIE), eliminate barriers to CIE, and phase out subminimum wage.
- Ensure access to clear, coordinated information about CIE supports.
- Strengthen feedback and accountability.
- Advance representation and address intersectionality.
- Develop a three-year plan that will be included in our Cabinet report in 2026.
- Ready students with disabilities for work and life.
- Emphasize transportation matters in the Governor's EF Cabinet.

The Cabinet would also like to express its appreciation for the one-on-one meetings EFOC conducted with agencies in order to work more collaboratively with them to formulate goals and recommendations that are feasible. We are encouraged by this development and think it will support greater success.

IX. Recommendations and Future Direction

The Cabinet has made significant progress in advancing Employment First principles and expanding opportunities for individuals with disabilities. While many advances have been made in the past year and prior years, there is still work to be done to ensure all individuals have access to Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). The Cabinet has identified the following priority areas to guide future work:

- **Deepen Employer Partnerships and Make Inclusive Hiring a cornerstone of the Commonwealth Workforce**
    - Expand and institutionalize direct engagement with employers—leveraging the Governor, First Lady, Cabinet leaders, and Business Services—to create long-term, statewide partnerships that translate advocacy into real hiring, work-based learning, and career pathways.
- **Strengthen Cross-Agency Coordination to Deliver Seamless Services**
    - Continue to ensure coordinated, person-centered services that follow individuals from education to employment to long-term stability.
- **Lead by Example: Position the Commonwealth as a Model Employer**
    - Strengthen inclusive hiring, internships, recruitment pipelines, accommodations, and retention strategies so state government itself demonstrates best practices and sets the standard for employers across Pennsylvania.
- **Embed Accessibility and Presumed Competence Across Government**
    - Advance physical and digital accessibility so all Commonwealth services, from hiring to education to online tools, are designed to include people with disabilities by default.
- **Data Transparency**
    - The Cabinet and Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC) worked together to develop the revised Employment First Data Dashboard to focus on targeted measures to assess progress and gaps. By streamlining the data request process this year, we have determined the most critical and actionable data points, reducing duplication, streamlining the process, and making the information readily available in different formats for any interested party to use. The specific data sets on the dashboard will remain static, but the data itself will be refreshed annually.
- **Collaboration**
    - Continue to raise awareness about Employment First work that the Commonwealth is conducting and collaborate with relevant stakeholders. In addition to EFOC, the Cabinet has engaged with the Workforce Development Board by attending meetings of the Barrier Remediation Committee. The Workforce Development Board has adopted recommendations to phase out 14(c) employment arrangements as well as other recommendations to support individuals with disabilities in their workplace.

- **Communication**
    - The Cabinet would like to continue to build on the progress to date and facilitate open dialogue with EFOC. To ensure that both entities are moving Employment First priorities forward, regular communication and coordination is critical. Ensuring that the recommendations and goals put forth by EFOC are specific and executable is key to continued progress. The Cabinet believes that increased communication and interaction with EFOC will result in positive outcomes for Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

X. Acknowledgements

The Governor's Office would like to acknowledge and thank the following members of the Cabinet and contributing staff, especially Jere Ilene Matthews and John Long in the Enterprise Data Office, for the development of this report and their continued partnership to advance Employment First principles in Pennsylvania:

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- Amy Sechrist

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- Joan Bradbury
- Erin Corrigan
- Rose McCarthy
- Katharine Paisley
- Meghna Patel
- Regina Yeung

XI. Appendices

Employment First Policy and Related Plans

Employment First Policy Page
Act 36 of 2018
Act 36 Three-Year Plan
Act 26 of 2016
PA WIOA Page
PA WIOA Combined State Plan 2024-2027

Reports and Data Dashboard

Employment First Cabinet Report 2025
Employment First Oversight Commission Report 2025Employment First Oversight Commission Report 2024
Employment First Data Dashboard
Employment First Data Dashboard – OVR Page
Act 26 Quarterly Report April - June 2025

Employment and Supportive Services Information

Employment First Resources
OVR Home Page
We Can Work Page
Secondary Transition Website
Connecting for Employment Video Series and Roadmap
Charting the Lifecourse Page
Everyday Lives Page
Employment First for Employers Page
Employment First for Providers Page