



## **Annual Report**



### **2024 Report to Governor Shapiro and the General Assembly**

**October 1, 2024**

"Employment First ...Competitive Integrated Employment 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."

- Act 36 of 2018

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## **Introduction**

### **Background**

#### **Employment First Pennsylvania: Act 36 Of 2018 – Summary and Purpose**

The Employment First Act in Pennsylvania aims to help people with disabilities find competitive integrated employment (jobs in regular workplaces where they can earn at least minimum wage). The law says that all local or state agencies that get funding from the government must follow these rules. Agencies need to work together to make sure they are spending money wisely to support this goal.

#### **Employment First Oversight Commission**

The Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC) was created by the Employment First Act to ensure the law is followed. The EFOC sets goals, tracks progress and writes a yearly public report on how well government agencies are meeting the Act's objectives. The report also suggests improvements. The EFOC's main tasks are:

- Setting goals and plans for the Act.
- Monitoring public agencies' implementation.
- Writing an annual report on progress and offering improvement ideas

### **The Past Year**

#### **Appointments**

In the last year, all the Commission seats mentioned in Act 36 were filled, except for one that was supposed to be appointed by the Senate president pro-tempore (which has never been filled). In 2025, there will be an additional vacancy that will need to be filled.

### **State Collaboration**

#### **Acknowledgement of Administration Staff who Provide Support to the Commission**

The Commission would like to thank the staff in the Governor's Policy Office who helped to get information and data the Commission needed, made sure people from different state agencies came to Commission meetings, supported the development of the report, and managed the logistics of the meetings, including setting up real-time captions,

finding meeting places, and announcements. Special thanks go to Thomas Foley, Katie Merritt, and Rose McCarthy in the Governor's Policy Office. The Commission also wishes to express its gratitude to many other people in many state agencies who have been part of the Commission's work and supported our efforts.

### **Act 36 of 2018 Applicability to All State Agencies**

Act 36 applies to all state agencies, departments, and contracts. In Section 4.a it says that ensuring that Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) is the preferred outcome for all Pennsylvanians with disabilities. This rule applies to all people with disabilities, regardless of what kind of help they need. Additionally, this Act encourages work-based learning experiences for all youth with a disability. Everyone with a disability who gets publicly funded services must be offered employment services and opportunities regardless of whether they live in their own home or in a residential setting.

Many state agencies that deal with disability employment have worked to move toward Employment First. Some of them include the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), the Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL), the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), the Bureau of Special Education (BSE), and the Office of Administration (OA). These agencies worked closely with the Commission and additional agencies have joined in the meetings held by the Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities. The Commission is grateful for these agencies and believes that Act 36 applies to all state entities. However, the Commission is still figuring out how to get all state agencies to understand the implications to their agencies and follow Act 36 policy.

### **Governor's January 2024 Update and Progress Annual Report**

In Section Four of the Act, the Office of the Governor is required to submit an annual report to the General Assembly, it should include:

- Clear expectations for employment that include annual baseline employment data and specific goals for individuals with a disability gaining Competitive Integrated Employment developed by State and county agencies and entities providing publicly funded education, training, employment and related services and long-term services and support for individuals with a disability
- An assessment of progress toward meeting these goals annually, and



- Documentation of continued and improved State agency compliance with the Act.

The 2024 Employment First Cabinet Report focused on initiatives and progress related to enhancing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. It highlights efforts in education, vocational training, and workplace accommodations to promote inclusivity and independence. Key areas include partnerships with employers, policy advancements, and outcomes in employment rates and economic self-sufficiency among disabled individuals in the state.

### **Data in this Report**

This year, the Governor’s Policy Office, Governor’s Employment First Cabinet, and the Enterprise Data Office in the Office for Information Technology worked to streamline Employment First data throughout state departments. The EFOC is grateful for this undertaking and looks forward to the progress that will come from it.

Data in this report comes from [Employment First Open Data Portal](#) with some supplemental information from the federal Department of Labor and additional data directly provided by state departments that had not been uploaded to the Portal at the time this report was written.

### **Department Self-Evaluations**

This year, the departments that are in the Governor’s Disability Cabinet and that provide data for the Employment First Oversight Commission’s efforts conducted internal self-assessments. They reflected on their goals for Employment First, progress, and barriers. These assessments have been used in developing this year’s recommendations. Information from the assessments has also been included in the “Department Progress” portion of each department section. We are grateful for the work put into it.

### **Cross Agency Goal and Objectives (Obj.)**

These goals, objectives, and recommendations are broad and are meant for all Pennsylvania departments and agencies, particularly those who are a member of the Governor’s Disability Cabinet.

### **PA Goal 1: Department Goals and Plans**

By the end of April 2025, all departments need to create specific plans, goals, and objectives to align with the requirements of the spirit of

Employment First (EF). These plans, goals, and objectives should be included in the department self-assessment.

## **PA Goal 2: Improved Data Collection and Usefulness**

Improve the ability to track and compare data regarding Employment First for Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

### **PA Obj 2.A: Surveys**

Starting in 2026, Departments that help people with disabilities should do regular surveys where the consumers can share complaints, how quickly they got the help they need, overall satisfaction, and recommendations. This should align with the Federal Access Rule and implementation.

The EFOC recommends conducting a survey to gather feedback from Pennsylvanians with disabilities regarding the effectiveness of services provided to them. This survey should include youth and adults with disabilities, their families, and caregivers, starting from the point of Early Intervention Services.

1. Response Times: Assess the promptness of state agencies and other service providers in responding to the needs of individuals with disabilities.
2. Employment Opportunities: Understand the expectations regarding job opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
3. Misconceptions: Explore and identify any misconceptions about the employability of adults with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disability.
4. Impact of Earnings: Evaluate how earning money affects access to essential public services for individuals with disabilities.
5. Barriers to Employment: Identify the barriers that make it difficult for people with disabilities to find and retain jobs.
6. On-Time Delivery: Evaluate the timeliness of service provisions.

This comprehensive survey will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current services and highlight areas that need improvement to better support Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

### **PA Obj 2.B: Collect and Report Demographics**

By 2027, all data collected regarding services for people with disabilities should include demographics to identify any gaps or barriers in services for specific populations. Data should include a

breakdown by race/ethnicity, gender, gender identity, disability type, LGBTQ+ status, and English as second language.

By 2028, all data reported should be broken down by these demographics.

## **Recommendations (Rec)**

### **PA Rec A: Data MoU**

By 2026, the state and Disability Cabinet members should develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to facilitate data sharing and coordination that includes employment status, and state and federal benefits received by working age individuals with disabilities. This information should be able to be shared across departments and when possible, this data should be made comparable to that collected by other departments.

### **PA Rec B: Cabinet Engagement with EFOC**

Starting immediately, each department in the Employment First Cabinet will attend and give updates on at least 50% of the EFOC meetings.

### **PA Rec C: County Employment Coalitions**

By 2027, every county should have or be a member of a Local Employment Coalition that brings together relevant parties to consider and implement new or improved ways that lead to more competitive integrated employment outcomes for people with disabilities. These Coalitions are a means of fostering collaboration, innovation, and local ownership in the pursuit of competitive integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. These coalitions have the potential to bring about positive change by addressing the unique needs and circumstances of each community. They also need to have all adult disability service systems, providers and county representatives attend regularly. Workforce Development Boards (WDB), OVR, and Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) programs should be strategically included in the Coalitions. Efforts should be made to ensure that the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and local transition coordinating councils are integrated into these coalitions.

## **Executive Branch (EB) and Office of Administration (OA) (including Civil Service Policy Office)**

*Authors: Julia Barol, Richard Edley, Mary Hartley, Andrew Pennington, Steve Suroviec, Heidi Tuszyński*

### **Abstract and Role in Employment First**

The Governor's Office of Administration plays a crucial role in Pennsylvania's executive branch by providing support, policy guidance and enforcement to all executive branch agencies under the Governor's jurisdiction. This includes:

- **Technology Management:** Overseeing the state's technology deployment, which involves setting standards, prioritizing projects, managing infrastructure, ensuring security, developing applications, overseeing project management, and staffing.
- **Employee Support:** Managing various aspects related to commonwealth employees, such as handling salaries, benefits, promoting diversity, providing training, ensuring workplace safety, and managing labor relations.
- **Emergency Coordination:** Coordinating planning and cooperation among state agencies to ensure the continuous provision of essential government services during emergencies and critical situations.
- **Records Management:** Administering the state's records management program. This includes creating policies, standards, and procedures to regulate the use, maintenance, retention, and disposal of records.
- **Hiring:** Managing outreach, applications, new employee surveys, and achieving the goal that 7% of the government workforce consists of people with disabilities.
- **Human Resources:** Supporting the needs and accommodations of state and local government employees, including disability accommodations.

Indeed, OA holds a unique and pivotal position within Pennsylvania's government structure. Given its broad responsibilities, OA has a significant opportunity to make a foundational impact on the employment of people with disabilities. By influencing policies, procedures, and practices related to technology deployment, employee support, emergency coordination, and records management, OA can play a key role in promoting inclusivity, accessibility, and equitable

employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities throughout the state's government agencies.

The Pennsylvania Office of Administration (OA) has the following plans to improve outcomes for people with disabilities in the labor market:

Forward job openings to OVR counselors, who will then refer potential candidates to apply. The pilot program will target long-term care facility custodial and food service positions.

Coordinate presentations between the HR Director, program managers, and OVR managers to raise awareness of the partnership and job openings. Recruitment will focus on areas with high student interest to attract more candidates.

The Bureau of Employee Relations (OS-BER) will collaborate with the Bureau of Organization Management (BOOM) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEOO) to create training for agencies on how to write accessible job descriptions and outline essential job functions.

## **Office of Administration (OA) Recommendations**

### **OA Rec A: Launch Targeted Hiring Pilot**

The Employment First Oversight Commission recommends launching a targeted hiring pilot program utilizing the current contract with Circa (the contracting agency that OA is using with identified jobs for people with disabilities) to increase employment opportunities for Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) customers and job seekers. The pilot will focus on enhancing employment prospects for individuals with disabilities by leveraging OVR resources. The goal is to refer to at least 100 OVR applicants, with a minimum of 20 being successfully hired within the first year. This will be facilitated by partnering with 10 state agencies, who will receive training and support on inclusive hiring practices from OVR or designated Subject Matter Experts. This initiative aligns with the Employment First mandate by actively creating employment pathways for individuals with disabilities. The program will launch by January 1, 2025, with the first year of implementation concluding on December 31, 2025.

### **OA Rec B: Increase OVR Intern Participation**

The Employment First Oversight Commission aims to increase the number of OVR interns placed within state agencies and expand internship opportunities for job seekers with disabilities. The initiative

will focus on boosting OVR internship placements within state agencies. The target is to achieve a 30% increase in placements compared to the 20 interns placed in 2023, reaching this goal by the end of the calendar year. A strategic outreach and support program will be developed to encourage agencies to hire OVR interns and to assist job seekers in securing these internships. This effort aligns with the department's commitment to providing meaningful career development opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The outreach program will be launched by January 31, 2025, with the goal of achieving the targeted increase by December 31, 2025.

#### **OA Rec C: Accessible Position Descriptions and Essential Functions**

The Employment First Oversight Commission aims to promote and ensure the use of accessible job descriptions with clearly defined essential functions across all state agencies. The initiative focuses on making position descriptions more accessible and ensuring essential functions are clearly outlined. The goal is to ensure that 100% of new job descriptions created and posted by state agencies include accessible language and clearly defined essential functions within one year. Training workshops will be conducted for HR personnel in all state agencies, supported by standardized templates and resources. OVR and Subject Matter Experts will be available to facilitate these trainings. This effort is crucial to making job opportunities accessible to individuals with disabilities, directly supporting the Employment First policy. The training workshops will be completed by June 30, 2025, with full compliance achieved by December 31, 2025.

#### **OA Rec D: Improve Tracking of Employees with Disabilities**

The Employment First Oversight Commission proposes developing and implementing a reliable system to track the percentage of employees who identify as having a disability within the department. This initiative aims to create a system for tracking disability disclosure data. The goal is to achieve a 70% response rate from employees on voluntary disability disclosure surveys within one year. The department will collaborate with HR and IT teams to design and deploy an anonymous, user-friendly survey system, coupled with an awareness campaign to encourage participation. This initiative supports the department's commitment to diversity and inclusion by gathering Time-bound\*\*: The tracking system will be launched by January 1, 2025, with the target response rate achieved by December 31, 2025.

The **Pennsylvania** [Employment First legislation](#) (2018) directs the Office of Administration (OA) to develop a framework for individuals to self-report a disability.

In **Maine**, a [2006 Executive Order](#) signed by Governor Baldacci requires [a survey](#) of employees to better understand the prevalence of employees with disabilities in state government.

In an effort to collect better baseline data on current employees with disabilities, **Massachusetts** surveyed participants regarding self-identification, disclosure and reasonable accommodation, the employment pipeline and agency culture.

Governor Parsons of **Missouri** issued [Executive Order 19-16](#) (2019) directing the Office of Administration, on an annual basis, collect data based on voluntary self-disclosure, report initial baseline numbers of state employees with disabilities and report and evaluate the state's progress in increasing the percentage of employees with disabilities in the state workforce.

**New York** enacted [S 06276](#) (2021), which requires the president of the civil service commission to conduct a study on the employment of persons and veterans with disabilities by the state and make recommendations as to whether the state needs to hire more persons and veterans with disabilities to fill the positions created by sections 55-b and 55-c of the civil service law.

Governor DeWine of **Ohio** issued [Executive Order 2019-03D: Establishing Ohio as a Disability Inclusion State and Model Employer of Individuals with Disabilities](#) (2019) directing all state agencies to collect and evaluate self-disclosed data through the state personnel system to be used to measure progress in hiring people with disabilities. This data will be used to develop a strategic plan.

### **OA Rec E: Increase Awareness and Participation in Disability Disclosure**

The Employment First Oversight Commission seeks to increase employee awareness and participation in disability disclosure to ensure more reliable data. The initiative focuses on raising awareness to encourage voluntary disability disclosure. At least three awareness campaigns and information sessions will be conducted over the next 12 months. Internal communication channels such as email newsletters, the intranet, and town hall meetings will be used to

educate employees on the importance and confidentiality of disability disclosure. Gathering accurate data on disabilities is crucial for fostering an inclusive workplace and achieving the Commonwealth's goal of 7% workforce representation. The campaigns and sessions will be held by March 31, 2025, July 31, 2025, and November 30, 2025.

## **Executive Branch (EB) Recommendations**

### **EB Rec A: Organize a Disability Employment Workgroup**

The Employment First Oversight Commission proposes organizing a disability employment workgroup to develop strategies for improving employment opportunities in state government for individuals with disabilities. The workgroup will involve the Governor's Policy Office, the Office of Administration (OA), and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). The group will consist of at least 10 members representing various stakeholders, with a minimum of six meetings scheduled within the first year. Key stakeholders, including representatives from the Governor's Policy Office, OA, OVR, the Arc, PEAL, disability advocacy groups, employers, and employees with disabilities, will be invited to participate. This initiative supports the goal of enhancing employment opportunities and creating an inclusive work environment for individuals with disabilities. The workgroup should be established by December 1, 2024, with the first meeting held by January 15, 2025, and an initial report with recommendations completed by June 30, 2025.

### **EB Rec B: Emphasize Transportation Matters in the Governor's Disability Cabinet**

The Employment First Oversight Commission recommends that the Governor's Disability Cabinet increase its focus on transportation issues affecting individuals with disabilities, including enabling transportation on demand for job interviews via smart devices through the waiver payment system (per DHS recommendations). The initiative will enhance transportation options for individuals with disabilities, allowing those in waivers to use waiver dollars for services like Uber and Lyft for interviews or competitive integrated employment (CIE). The goal is to develop and implement at least three new transportation initiatives or policy recommendations within the next 12 months. A transportation subcommittee will be formed within the Disability Cabinet, involving transportation experts, disability advocacy groups, and individuals with disabilities. This initiative is essential to improving accessibility and mobility, which are crucial for the



independence and employment opportunities of individuals with disabilities. The subcommittee will be established by December 1, 2024, with the three new transportation initiatives or recommendations developed and presented by June 30, 2025.

### **EB Rec C: Establish an Employment First Executive Director Position**

The Governor's Office should create a state-funded "Employment First Executive Director" position housed within the Governor's Office, the Department of Labor and Industry, or the Department of Human Services. This dedicated role is essential for managing the requirements of the Employment First law, which includes reviewing policies and data, coordinating with various governmental entities, and supporting the drafting of annual reports.

The Executive Director will be responsible for:

- Convening and preparing for Commission and committee meetings.
- Facilitating data requests.
- Reviewing and analyzing employment first plans published by the executive branch.
- Assisting the commission in drafting, finalizing, and publishing its annual report.

Given the complexity and scope of these tasks, it is unrealistic to expect an all-volunteer commission to manage these responsibilities effectively without dedicated staff support.

## **General Assembly (GA)**

*Authors: Josie Badger, Representative Dan Miller, Susan Tachau, and Heidi Tuszynski*

### **Abstract and Role in Employment First**

The Pennsylvania's General Assembly consists of the state Senate and House of Representatives. They must work together to lead the state in being truly Employment First. In this section of the report, we talk about different ideas for new laws and rules. These ideas aim to make it easier for people with disabilities to find jobs.

### **Agency Goal and Objectives (Obj.)**

#### **GA. Goal 1: End use of subminimum wage labor**

The main goal of the Employment First law, the EFOC, and this report is to make sure that Pennsylvanians with disabilities can get CIE. To make this happen, collaborative effort across state departments and guidance from the General Assembly must occur.

#### **GA. Obj. 1.A: Subminimum Wage Hearings**

Host annual hearings on the status of 14Cs, 2380s, and 2390s and progress made to move employees into CIE. These hearings should lead to the development of a comprehensive plan to phase out subminimum wage and segregated work.

#### **GA. Obj. 1.B: End State Contracts that Support Subminimum Wage**

Starting immediately, the state should not contract with companies that pay subminimum wage or have employees working in a segregated setting. 14c certificates let companies pay less than the minimum wage.

Under Section 520<sup>1</sup>, companies that have a workforce where 75% of the direct labor is provided by employees with disabilities get state contracts for things they make or services they provide without having to compete with other companies.

By ending subminimum wage and changing the percentage of employees that must have disabilities, contracts under Section 520

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<sup>1</sup> Title 62, Commonwealth Procurement Code, Chapter 5, Subchapter B - <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/LI/CT/HTM/62/62.HTM>

would still provide jobs for employees with disabilities but would also pay at least minimum wage and be inclusive.<sup>2</sup>

## **GA. Goal 2: Support Effectiveness of EFOC and EF Cabinet**

Use the General Assembly's powers and responsibilities to help the EFOC and Cabinet work better and be more effective.

### **GA. Obj. 2.A: EFOC Appointment**

In 2024, the Senate President Pro-Tempore should appoint a new EFOC Commissioner. All the appointments as outlined in Act 36 were filled during the past year except for the one available to the Senate President Pro-Tempore (which has yet to be filled since the EFOC was first convened in early 2019). The Commission feels strongly that this seat needs to be filled to be able to fulfill the duties as envisioned by the General Assembly when Act 36 was passed.

### **GA. Obj. 2.B: EFOC Executive Director**

By December 2024, the Commission recommends that the Senate pass HB1834 to amend Act 36 of 2018 to create an Executive Director position for the EFOC. Representative Dan Miller's HB1834 was passed by the House and referred to the Senate Labor and Industry Committee in April 2024. This bill amends the Employment First Act by creating a new role of "Executive Director of the Employment First Oversight Commission."

The Commission's work is detailed and time-consuming, requiring the support of an Executive Director. This person would handle tasks such as organizing Commission and committee meetings, managing data requests, reviewing and analyzing Employment First plans from the executive branch, and helping the Commission draft, finalize, and publish its annual report.

In addition to the Commission's support of this bill, it also supports two amendments to this bill. The first would be to move the EFOC's annual report date from October 1 to November 1. The October 1 deadline for the commission's yearly report is difficult to achieve. After receiving the data from each department at the end of July or

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<sup>2</sup> PA's procurement initiative is the State Use Program under the Department of General Services (DGS). This program awards contracts to nonprofit agencies that employ individuals with disabilities to supply goods and services to state agencies. The program aligns with Section 520's objective by providing opportunities for employment to individuals with significant disabilities.

beginning of August, it often takes three months to develop the report. The second amendment would be to add the Department of Corrections (DOC) to the EF Cabinet. Including the DOC in the Employment First Cabinet would help improve reentry opportunities for individuals with disabilities by aligning employment programs with reentry efforts. It would enhance collaboration across agencies, reduce barriers to employment, and support initiatives that lower recidivism. By doing so, the DOC can play a vital role in creating more inclusive employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals.

### **GA. Obj. 2.C: 3-Year Employment First Plans**

By 2025, legislation or an Executive Order should be established to require the creation of 3-year Employment First plans for the Commonwealth. Like the initial three-year plan developed by the Governor and Cabinet to advance the goals of Employment First, similar three-year plans should be developed on an ongoing basis to set the goals and expectations throughout the state and its progress towards Employment First. This report should be a collaboration between the Governor's office, Cabinet, EFOC, and any other necessary entities.

### **GA. Goal 3: State Benefits Support Employment**

Ensure that medical supports and Home and Community-Based Services support participants in competitive integrated employment.

#### **GA. Obj. 3.A: Hearing on Impact of Waivers on Employment**

Starting in 2025, the General Assembly should host annual hearings with the Secretary of the DHS, Deputy Secretaries from relevant offices, and individuals who have waivers to better understand how different types of support services and the money for those services impact job opportunities and CIE for people in ODP and OLTL.

The hearings should examine employment data, employment service utilization, and employment outcomes. It would be useful to know more about what OLTL and ODP have done to try to improve the CIE of their participants and their needs from the state to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Additionally, the hearings should review potential reasons for the low employment rates, including the impact of inadequate or lack of services within and between ODP and OLTL. These may include reimbursement rates, pay and incentives to Direct Care Providers

(also known as Direct Service Professionals), rates for employment services, etc.

The General Assembly should work to address the identified gaps between the provider systems and develop the necessary policy and procedure to ensure that the waivers are able to truly support community living, including CIE.

### **GA. Obj. 3.B: Expansion of Medical Assistance For Workers With Disabilities**

During the 2025-26 session, amend Medical Assistance For Workers With Disabilities (MAWD) to align all categories with CMS guidelines to allow all MAWD participants to earn more and have assets.

When Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities: Workers with Job Success (MAWD:WJS) was signed, DHS was unaware of amendments that would be necessary to align with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) requirements, which would allow the federal government to cover some of the expenses for individuals in this program. To align, the General Assembly should work with DHS to identify the necessary amendments and to develop a bill to address them. The amendments would allow individuals to take high quality, well-paid jobs immediately without needing to wait one year on the basic MAWD program (as it is written now). It would also allow all individuals on the program to start saving for emergencies or retirement.

Additionally, advocates have raised concerns for individuals who, due to their disability, may have to stop working but may be eligible for Medicaid due to assets gained in MAWD. The General Assembly should review workable solutions to this issue and include these in the amendment to Act 69.

The MAWD: Modernization Act was introduced by Representative Benham in 2024. This bill would address the issues above, but the General Assembly is waiting for information from the DHS and/or CMS for further information before proceeding with the bill. The Commission encourages the continued work on this bill.

As of [July 2024](#) there were 35,770 individuals with MAWD and 733 individuals with MAWD:WJS. Thanks to OIM for providing this data.

### **GA. Obj. 3.C. Support Direct Care Providers in OLTL and ODP**

By 2026 the General Assembly, Governor's Office, and DHS should have a plan to better recruit, hire, and maintain Direct Care Providers in OLTL and ODP.

Dependable, high-quality direct care providers play a critical role in helping individuals with disabilities to maintain employment. Without a robust, dependable care provider, people with disabilities are not able to participate and/or perform effectively in the workplace.

Improving direct care provider rates and benefits could be done through multiple means. The adoption of a nationally recognized market index will help provide stability to this system and support the diligent caregivers that are essential to the delivery of services for Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

#### **GA. Goal 4: Support Education in Preparing Students for CIE**

The General Assembly should use its powers and responsibilities to help the education system in preparing students for CIE.

##### **GA. Obj. 4.A: Full-Time Transition Counselors**

By 2026, pass legislation to establish full-time transition counselors in each school district.

Currently, most local education agencies (LEAs) assign "transition coordinator" responsibilities to someone who already has a different full-time job in the school. Just following the rule to have a transition coordinator is not enough.

The EFOC proposes that the General Assembly create a new law and provide the needed money to make sure every school district has at least one full-time (or a reasonable equivalent based on student numbers) Transition Coordinator to help students with their transition plans, especially integrated into local jobs and community activities. These coordinators will be well-trained and skilled in helping students transition from school to work. Additionally, the Pennsylvania Department of Education would be responsible for making sure this rule is followed by all school districts. This change will help students prepare for jobs better.

##### **GA. Obj. 4.B: Study on Hiram G. Andrews Center**

In 2025, the General Assembly should call for a study and report on the return on investment of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation on

Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) as compared to traditional customer services delivered by OVR.

The Commission continues to believe an in-depth review of this facility-based program and its return on investment (ROI) ought to be conducted by the General Assembly. Approximately \$25 million is directed from OVR's traditional services to fund this 24/7 campus operation. OVR's per-customer cost for HGAC students is significantly higher than its traditional customers, yet it is unclear what value graduates of HGAC are getting as compared to OVR's traditional customers or OVR customers who attend typical post-secondary vocational programs. The review should consider whether these resources could be effectively re-directed to traditional OVR services and/or regional or county career technical programs and/or community colleges where individuals with disabilities can learn alongside other students, which will enhance their skills to work and live in their community. The study should also look at the employment outcomes in comparison to outcomes of OVR participants who receive higher education or training in other integrated settings. This recommendation has been included in each of the four EFOC reports.

### **GA. Goal 5: 7% of Government Workforce are Employees with Disabilities**

At least 7% of workers in state and local government should be people with disabilities. This goal was first created within the Federal Government and has since been increased.

State Departments have asked how it may be possible to maintain an up-to-date percentage of state workers with disabilities. One example was established in Illinois. The Illinois Departments of Human Rights, Human Services, Central Management Services, along with the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities and other state agencies, [conduct an ongoing online survey](#) for employees with disabilities. This survey allows employees to self-identify and indicate if they may need assistance during an emergency evacuation.

### **GA. Obj. 5.A: Establish a Schedule A-Like Program**

By 2026, amend the Civil Service Reform Act to establish a Schedule A-like program and customized employment in state jobs.

The General Assembly should amend the state Civil Service Reform Act to remove roadblocks to employment and ensure access and inclusion

for people with disabilities to be hired by state government agencies (see previous HB 348).

By creating a program like the federal government's "Schedule A" process, agencies can hire people with disabilities for jobs without making them go through the usual competitive process. This would make it easier for qualified disabled people to get jobs in the state government. This program could help remove or reduce the problems caused by a lot of rules and paperwork, making it simpler for people with disabilities to get hired. It may be possible for the Executive Branch to implement such improvements without legislation, but it remains unclear, and the General Assembly may want to hold hearings on this topic.

The General Assembly should include a section on "customized employment," which lets state agencies create a "customized employment" job classification, which would enable people with disabilities to be hired who can perform some of the specific job duties but not all. Customized employment is a strength-based approach that would create job opportunities for otherwise qualified job applicants with disabilities who, due to their disability, may not be able to perform some parts of the job.

OVR should be included as a key partner with OA in this endeavor.

The Commission suggests that education regarding customized employment, Schedule A, and other disability related programs be provided throughout the departments to improve the use of these employment supports.

Pennsylvania may look to the federal government's "[Schedule A Excepted Service Hiring Authority for Individuals with Disabilities](#)" as a model. Schedule A allows federal agencies to access a diverse talent pool without using the traditional, often lengthy hiring process. Through Schedule A, individuals with disabilities can apply for federal jobs through a noncompetitive process. If an applicant meets the eligibility requirements and the minimum qualifications for a job, they can be hired without competing with the public.



## **Department of Human Services (DHS)**

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### **Abstract and Role in Employment First**

The Department of Human Services (DHS) plays a vital role in helping people with disabilities find jobs. Many of these individuals have low incomes and can receive assistance from Medicaid, a government program that covers medical care and long-term support services. These services can be provided in facilities or at home.

Through Medicaid, tens of thousands of people with disabilities receive home and community-based services (HCBS). HCBS allows people to get support at home or in the community rather than in a care facility like a nursing home. This option, known as a "waiver," gives them more freedom and support while staying in their own homes. Those with a waiver can also access Supported Employment services, which help them get and keep a job.

People with waivers have Support Coordinators (SCs) (also known as a Service Coordinator in different programs). SCs can influence whether someone chooses a Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) job or an activity in a segregated place. The SC works closely with people with disabilities to create plans (sometimes called Individualized Supports Plan or ISP). The state's Employment First Act (a law called Act 36 of 2018) says that CIE should be the first choice for participants of any program that gets public funding, like HCBS. So, the SC's role is important in making sure this law is followed. They help put the spirit of the Employment First Act into action by collaborating with individuals to choose CIE.

DHS also plays a role in how Employment First by providing money for Supported Employment Services. The Employment First Act says DHS should give more money to make sure CIE is incentivized.

Lastly, DHS can also impact Employment First through the rules they make about services in their Medicaid HCBS waivers. These rules (service definitions) determine what services are allowed, how they are provided, what qualifications providers need, and how long the service can be given. If these rules are too strict, inflexible, or have a lot of requirements that cost too much, it can become hard to find providers to offer the service. This can make it hard for people who

want CIE to find a Supported Employment Service provider to help them.

## **Employment First Progress (as reported in department self-assessment)**

### **OLTL**

CHC-MCO may also authorize MA-funded services to help participants secure employment.

CMS approved an amendment removing OVR referral requirements to make accessing benefit counseling services easier.

OLTL developed a new MCO pay for performance measure that would require MCOs to reach supported employment 2.5% benchmark for CIE.

### **ODP**

In 2023, 95 providers of Supported Employment, Benefits Counseling, or Small Group Employment services have been determined eligible to receive payments for serving more people in FY 2022-2023 than they did prior to 2019-2020 (about \$5 million in incentive payments for 2023).

ODP developed and disseminated county level employment reports that include data on CIE etc. evaluated by race for each county or county joinder. ODP asked each county or county joinder to review data, evaluate whether any significant disparities exist between races, determine the reason for disparities that may exist, and adopt strategies to address.

Progress continues to be made in the number and the percentage of people employed aged 18-64 enrolled with ODP.

### **OMHSAS**

Counties report annually to DHS if, and to what extent, they are engaged in supported employment services.

22 County/County Joinder mental health offices follow SAMHSA Supported Employment Evidence-Based Practice as reported on FY 2022-23 County Human Services Plans.

## Goals and Objectives (Obj.)

### DHS Goal 1: Unified Goals and Efforts to Expand CIE

DHS will work across all offices to create a person-centered approach to improve the rate of competitive integrated employment for individuals served by its programs. Annually these goals, objectives, and recommendations will be reviewed and updated.

#### DHS Obj. 1: 10% More Individuals with Waivers will have CIE

Every year, the percentage of adults with a waiver who have CIE will go up by at least 10% from the previous year. The commission recognizes that the process to achieve this goal will be different under each waiver and office. It may be helpful for the Department to provide a brief description of how the goal will be obtained according to the policies of each office. Within the OLTL, data will need to continue to be collected from each MCO.

This year, ODP provided different data than in previous years. Rather than providing numbers and percentages of participants with CIE, they provided information regarding the number who have an Employment Goal in their ISP (13,826), number with an Employment Services Authorized (5,380), and the percentage with Employment Services Utilized (4,267). This information can be found on the [Open Data Portal](#).

In 2023 in OLTL, there were 65,108 people ages 21 to 64 who were part of CHC, this was an increase of 6,689 participants. Of these people, only 1.53% had jobs (an increase from 1.11% in 2022) and 1.38% were in CIE settings. These numbers do not count people who were part of OBRA. The OLTL has added services to help working-aged people find and keep jobs in their programs, but there is a gap between the services authorized through individualized plans and the services that people are getting.

In 2022-23, OMHSAS reported that 3462 participants received County Joinder Mental Health Employment or Vocational Services.

#### DHS Obj. 3: Improve System Software

By 2027, the DHS system software will include notifications and safeguards for County Assistance Office staff regarding benefits for working clients with disabilities. These notifications should include potential programs that a worker with a disability may be eligible for

and alerts to recently updated information that could affect the individual's eligibility for benefits with prompts to other potential programs such as MAWD.

The EFOC was pleased to hear that in 2024 DHS initiated a process of monthly mailing MAWD eligibility information to individuals whose eligibility ends that are more likely to be MAWD eligible to provide them information about the ability to return to eligibility on the MAWD program.

#### **DHS Obj. 4: Automatic prompt for OVR referral**

By 2025, all SCs will ask consumers whether they would like a referral for OVR and/or benefits counseling as soon as an Employment Goal is added to their ISP.

Once referred, OVR can determine if the individual is eligible and/or if the person had been a customer of OVR in the past. If they are determined eligible, then OVR can begin creating or updating their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), and/or provide services needed for (CIE) If OVR determines that the individual is not eligible for services, then employment services can be added to the participant's ISP and provided by ODP/CHC/OLTL in pursuit of CIE.

#### **DHS Obj. 5: Participants with Employment Goal Receiving Supports**

By 2026, 90% of people with a HCBS waiver, who have an employment goal in their Individual Support Plan/Person Centered Service Plan(ISP/PCSP), will have at least one of the following statuses Have CIE

- Receive support in getting a job,
- Receive employment supports, or
- Be directed to WIPA for benefits guidance.

The number of employment services approved by ISP/PCSPs for people receiving services has increased. However, there is a gap between the number of people with an employment goal versus people who have approved or provided services. All individuals who have a goal of employment should be able to work, with the supports needed to be successful.

#### **DHS Obj. 6: Increase the number of working-age waiver participants with an Employment Goal**

Starting in 2024, ODP and OMHSAS should collaborate with the EFOC to create employment targets for service recipients. These targets should be used as a benchmark and to promote growth.

In 2023, 2,075 participants in OLTL (which is about 3.19% of the participants) had an employment goal in their support plan. 13,826 in ODP had an employment goal. This raises the question of what might be stopping SCs from talking about employment and the reason for the significant difference between these numbers.

### **DHS Obj. 6: Annual increase for Supported Employment rates.**

Starting in 2024, ODP and OMHSAS should collaborate with the EFOC to create targets for Employment for participants. These targets should be used as a benchmark and to promote growth.

OLTL developed a new MCO pay for performance measure for agreement and measurement year 2024 that would require MCOs to reach a supported employment 2.5% benchmark for competitive integrated employment based on the MCO's ratio of HCBS population age group of 21-64. An increase to 2.5% would represent a growth of over 60%. Additionally, ODP will soon be utilizing performance-based contracting to ensure that providers with a record of good outcomes are used for employment services.

The employment rate for DHS waiver participants is dismal. This is partly because the money given to those who provide employment services is extremely low. So, many providers do not offer these services. In 2024, the state increased ODP reimbursement rates. This was a great step but only supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are enrolled in ODP waiver services. This increase only supported a small percentage of all Pennsylvanians with disabilities who are dependent on a state Medicaid waiver. Rates should increase for all waiver recipients as the cost-of-living increases.

## **Recommendations (Rec)**

### **DHS Rec. 1: Merge Subminimum Wage Licenses**

In 2025, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) should review which licensed facilities are authorized to pay subminimum wages, with a focus on restricting this practice to licensed Vocational Facilities under code 2390.

Allowing subminimum wage activities in both 2380 (training facilities) and 2390 (vocational facilities) licenses creates confusion for those involved in evaluating, funding, and developing policies. The overlap in facility functions blurs their distinct roles: 2380s focus on training and day activities, while 2390s are intended for employment services. This confusion complicates compliance with regulatory standards, makes it harder to ensure proper health and safety protections, and impacts funding decisions and policy development by making it difficult to differentiate between training and employment services. Limiting subminimum wage activities to 2390 facilities would streamline oversight and resource allocation.

DHS should also ensure that individuals receiving subminimum wage support are placed in the appropriate facilities. The two types of licenses that currently allow for subminimum wage activities, 2380 and 2390, should be reconsidered. The Commission recommends that 2390 facilities are the most suitable for these activities.

### **DHS Rec. 2: Public Awareness of Benefits for Workers with Disabilities**

Annually, DHS will run a public education campaign to raise awareness about Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD) and the MAWD: Workers with Job Success law. Making people aware of MAWD is important. Education on these changes should be provided each year to disability organizations, County Assistance Offices (CAO), OVR customers, people with disabilities, and family members.

Additionally, all departments (including the County Assistance Offices) that work directly with individuals with disabilities and those that may be involved in the employment of people with disabilities should have a working knowledge on Medical Assistance For Workers With Disabilities, Medical Assistance For Workers With Disabilities: Workers With Job Success and other programs that allow individuals with disabilities to work, earn, and save.

### **DHS Rec. 3: Improve safeguards from loss of benefits.**

By 2026, DHS should work with their technology and data organizations to “flag” potential errors or issues that could cause a participant to lose their benefits with enough time to address the issue before the individual no longer receives the support.

Currently, there are strict rules about who is eligible for services based on income and assets. The timing of when income enters an account

and when bills are paid, as well as small mistakes, can quickly make someone ineligible for benefits, regardless of the need for services.

People with disabilities and their fiscal agents should be educated to learn how this process works. There should be enough time after the notice of the possibility of losing benefits to allow for the CAO to review the changes in the consumer's information that caused a loss of eligibility, the chance for the CAO to correct possible errors, and sufficient time for the beneficiary to file an appeal before the services are lost.

#### **DHS Rec. 4: Support On-Demand Transportation**

By 2027, DHS should review their Home and Community-Based Waiver programs to identify ways that CMS would support the inclusion of on-demand transportation services (like Uber and Lyft) in waiver services. This adjustment would enable individuals to use their allocated waiver funds to get to their competitive integrated jobs on time, every time. Without on-demand transportation, keeping a job in the community is made more difficult because workers must rely on the Shared Ride Program, provider transportation, or family.

#### **DHS Rec. 5: Incentivize Support/Service Coordinators with Improved Employment Outcomes**

By 2027, DHS should either directly incentivize or encourage incentivizing Supports Coordinators/Service Coordinators (SC) who support their participants who have an employment goal in their service plan in getting Competitive Integrated Employment.

Employment First makes sure that Competitive Integrated Employment is the first option and expected outcome of publicly funded services. The SCs are the first and primary place where employment should be discussed with the program participant. SCs can help promote employment with participants, yet there has not been major improvement in the numbers, especially in the following areas:

- Employment as a goal in participants' Individualized Support Plan/Person-Centered Service Plan (ISP/PCSP)
- Employment services authorized in the ISP/PCSP.
- Employment services provided.
- Referrals to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Referrals to Work Incentive Program Assistance (for benefits counseling), and

- Competitive integrated employment outcomes.

ODP plans to explore this through implementation of Selective Contracting for SCs in 2026.

OLTL developed a new MCO pay for performance measure for agreement and measurement year 2024 that would require MCOs to reach a supported employment 2.5% benchmark for competitive integrated employment based on the MCO's ratio of HCBS population age group of 21-64. Currently, an increase to 2.5% would represent an increase of over 60%.

### **DHS Rec. 6: Financial Education Program**

By 2026, DHS should work with CMS to obtain approval of financial education as a standalone service for waiver recipients.

Learning about money and how to manage it (which is also called financial education or financial literacy) is important for people with disabilities who want to become independent by working. Everyone should have the knowledge to make smart choices about things like making a budget, earning money, saving safely, paying taxes, building good credit, and protecting themselves from identity theft. Additionally, it is also important to know how money can affect benefits. This education should also include supports for workers with disabilities like ABLE savings program, MAWD, Ticket to Work, etc.

### **DHS Rec. 7: Work with PDE to Improve training for youth who are incarcerated.**

Objective 1.C: By September 2025, DHS will create and launch a joint initiative with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to support vocational training and skill development for youth with disabilities who in the juvenile justice system, incorporating cross-agency relationships to better coordinate educational and employment outcomes.

### **ODP Recommendations (Rec.)**

The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) will work to ensure that all participants have the supports, services, and opportunities to have Competitive Integrated Employment.



## **DHS-ODP Rec. 1: Update Service Definitions for Advanced Supported Employment**

By 2026, ODP should review and make needed changes to the service definition for Advanced Supported Employment. This should include eligibility, rates, and the method of service reimbursement.

Not many people are using Advanced Employment Services. This might be for two reasons. First, the rules for who can use the service are strict, so not everyone qualifies. Second, the service providers only get paid if they achieve certain outcomes, which might make them less interested in offering the service. While it is a good idea to pay based on results, it works best once the system is well-established.

## **OLTL Recommendations (Rec.)**

The Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) will work to ensure that all participants have the supports, services, and opportunities to have Competitive Integrated Employment.

### **DHS-OLTL Rec. 1: Review Each MCO's Employment Rates**

Starting in 2025, OLTL will work annually with the MCOs in Community HealthChoices to review the rates for supported employment services, check how successful these services are, and decide if the rate needs to be increased. Baseline data will be available through the Mercer study.

### **DHS-OLTL Rec. 2: Direct Caregiver Wages**

By 2026, OLTL should create a plan to improve direct caregiver services, allowing more participants to obtain CIE.

Reliable, high-quality caregivers are vital to enabling people with disabilities to get and keep Competitive Integrated Employment. It is essential that CHC MCOs have enough personal assistance providers and homecare nurses in their network who can fully staff the services authorized by the MCOs. As a result, many waiver participants go with authorized hours of personal assistance unstaffed or unqualified caregivers. This makes it impossible for some CHC waiver participants to seek and maintain CIE as they lack the support needed to get dressed for a job, take transportation to work and manage personal care needs while at work.

Current Rate for Hour of Service to Providers (not the Direct Care Worker) in OLTL's Community HealthChoices

PAS Region 1: Pittsburgh/Washington County: \$19.32

PAS Region 2: Erie: \$21.48

PAS Region 3: Harrisburg: \$20.20

PAS Region 4: Philadelphia and SE PA \$21.52

As a means of ensuring network adequacy of Direct Care Providers, OLTL should consider ways to encourage MCOs to :

- Create a wage equalization fund for the sole purpose of increasing CHC direct care workers' wages to a level equal to direct support professional workers in the ODP waivers or prevailing marketplace wages, whichever is higher. This fund should be separate from the capitated rate paid to the MCOs to ensure it is not used for other purposes.
- Create an enhanced tier of PAS services for CHC waiver participants with complex conditions with a higher pay rate, like the enhanced in-home and community supports service under the ODP waivers.
- Require CHC MCOs to report unfilled PAS hours to OLTL along with their other monthly reports.
- Review wage rates on an annual basis to determine wage comparability with prevailing wages in the marketplace.

Significant changes may occur with new CMS final rule: [Federal Register :: Medicaid Program; Ensuring Access to Medicaid Services](#). It states that at least 80 percent of all Medicaid payments, including but not limited to base payments and supplemental payments, be spent on compensation to direct care workers: homemaker services, home health aide services, and personal care services.

### **OMHSAS Recommendations (Rec.)**

The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) will work to ensure that all participants have the supports, services, and opportunities to have Competitive Integrated Employment.

#### **DHS-OMHSAS Rec. 1: Adding Employment Services to the "Community-Based Care Management" program**

Starting in 2024, OMHSAS should review the possibility of adding Employment Services to the "Community-Based Care Management" program.

OMHSAS told the EFOC that according to the Medicaid waiver given for the Behavioral Health Choices program, the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services does not allow employment services to be a regular part of the program. This means each county's mental health or behavioral health programs must separately try to help people get employment support.

To address this issue, Employment Services should be built into the "Community-Based Care Management" program, allowing BH-MCOs to choose to offer employment services as part of an overarching plan to address social determinants of health.

### **DHS-OMHSAS Rec. 2: Explore Expansion of Community Autism Peer Specialist (CAPS)**

Starting immediately, DHS should explore funding opportunities to expand CAPS across the state, with funding from Behavioral Health Choices, ODP, and/or OVR. CAPS is a program made by Community Behavioral Health (CBH). It uses an approach where people who have been through similar experiences (Certified Peer Specialists) help young adults (14-17 years old), and adults look for and find employment services. Even though the services in Behavioral Health (BH) Health Choices are different in each place, this model program could be supported by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and suggested to other BH-MCOs

## **Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)**

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### **Abstract and Role in Employment First**

Inclusive education is essential for helping people with disabilities get and keep jobs. When individuals receive the right education and training, like graduating from high school and getting additional job-related skills, they have a better chance of finding stable employment.

A key part of this process is transition planning. This helps people with disabilities understand their strengths and how they can use those abilities to reach their personal and career goals. It also encourages them to speak up for themselves and make informed decisions about their future careers.

Support from family, teachers, mentors, and friends is also very important. By creating new educational programs and awareness campaigns, we can encourage society to be more inclusive of people with disabilities in the workforce. This helps shift public attitudes toward recognizing the value of employing people with disabilities.

In summary, education equips people with disabilities with the skills they need, supports them in setting and achieving their goals, and helps change how society views them in the workplace, leading to better job opportunities for all.

### **Employment First Progress (as reported in department self-assessment)**

- Connecting for Employment Initiative: discussions around regional level transition resources and activities as well as strategic planning for implementation.
- PaTTAN and Community of Partnership continues to enhance PA Secondary Transition website.
- Monthly Transition Tidbit newsletters are sent to all interested parties.
- Through PATTAN, PDE develops ongoing professional development opportunities.
- To build knowledge and skill of work-based learning professionals, PDE offers a self-paced course called Work-Based Learning: A Guide for Program Implementation.
- Three Youth Engagement Specialists at PDE work in collaboration with OVR to help students build essential skills for self-advocacy and self-determination.

## **Agency Goal and Objectives (Obj.)**

### **PDE Goal 1: Prevent Transition to Segregated Settings.**

Ensure continuity of inclusive education settings for students with disabilities across transitions (e.g., birth to school age, middle school to high school) by 2024.

#### **PDE Obj 1.A. Minimize Transitions to More Restrictive Settings**

By January 2026, reduce by 10% the percentage of students transitioning from less restrictive to more restrictive settings, with the aim of ensuring that 75% of students with disabilities are placed in the least restrictive environment possible by 2030. This will be done by identifying, targeting, and supporting regions in the state where segregation is most prevalent. (Given the challenge of designing a measurement to determine how students may be moving to segregation at certain school levels, the commission requests baseline data Point in Time January 15, 2025, identifying movement to more or less restrictive settings.)

#### **PDE Obj 1.B: Consistent Educational Experience**

By June 2025, develop and implement at least three new policies to support consistent educational experiences in inclusive environments from preschool through high school, ensuring all schools have the resources and training needed to comply by December 2026.

#### **PDE Obj 1.C: Comprehensive Monitoring and Data Analysis**

By December 2025, establish a comprehensive monitoring and data analysis system to track student transitions from inclusive to segregated settings across various educational stages, with quarterly reports to ensure adherence to inclusive education principles and identify areas for improvement.

### **PDE Goal 2: Increase Competitive Employment Post-Graduation.**

Facilitate successful transitions from high school to competitive employment in integrated settings through coordinated efforts by PDE, OVR, and ODP.

#### **PDE Obj 2.A: Baseline Data**

By April 2025, identify baseline data and percentage of graduating students preparing for post-secondary education (and future employment).

### **PDE Obj 2.B: Identify Under Collaborating Districts**

By April 2025, identify high school/districts that are currently not collaborating with OVR to provide Pre-ETS and CIE transitions.

### **PDE Obj 2.C:**

By December 2025, develop and implement a system to track and report employment outcomes of graduates who received transition services, with bi-annual reports to assess the effectiveness of these services and make necessary improvements by June 2026.

## **PDE Goal 3: Expand Access to Competitive Integrated Employment for graduates with disabilities**

Expand opportunities for high school graduates with disabilities to attain competitive integrated employment through increased access to support services, work-based learning experiences, and partnerships with local businesses

### **PDE Obj 3.A: Increase CIE for High-School Students**

Each year, the Commonwealth will steadily increase access to competitive integrated public and private employment for high school students with disabilities with funding and/or support from either OVR or PDE.

### **PDE Obj 3.B: Work Experience**

Provide work-based learning experiences, job coaching, and other supports to facilitate employment.

### **PDE Obj 3.C: Business Partnerships**

Develop partnerships with local businesses to create more employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

## **PDE Goal 4: Enhance Financial Education for Transition-Age Students**

Improve financial literacy and management skills among transition-age students to better prepare them for independence and employment.

### **PDE Obj 4.A: Financial Literacy Modules**

By June 2025, integrate financial education modules into the curriculum for all high school students, ensuring at least 75% of transition-age students complete the modules by June 2026 and 100% by June 2027

### **PDE Obj 4.B: Collaborate with Financial Institutions**

By June 2025, collaborate with local financial institutions and organizations to provide workshops and seminars on fiscal management, on programs like the ABLE savings program and supporter decision-making, reaching at least 50% of transition-age students by December 2025 and 100% by June 2026.

### **PDE Obj 4.3: Monitor Financial Literacy**

By December 2025 implement a tracking system to monitor the financial literacy progress of transition-age students, with quarterly reports to assess the effectiveness of the financial education program and make necessary adjustments by June 2026.

## **PDE Goal 5: Improve Data Transparency and Reporting**

Enhance the accessibility and clarity of education data by publishing detailed reports on various school types and tracking student outcomes to identify disparities and inform targeted interventions.

### **PDE Obj 5.A: Act 26 Data for Cyber Schools**

By June 2025, publish Act 26 data separately for cyber schools, brick-and-mortar schools, and by Local Education Agency (LEA) on a dedicated online platform to identify and address potential disparities.

### **PDE Obj 5.B: Monitor Drop-Out Rates**

By June 2025, implement a system to track and report the number of students aged 14-22 with transition plans who drop out of school. Produce quarterly reports to identify gaps and develop targeted interventions.

**Sub-objective:** By June 2025, monitor dropout rates among students with disabilities, providing semi-annual reports to identify disparities and improve support and intervention strategies.

**Sub-objective:** By June 2026, conduct follow-up studies to gain insights into the long-term educational and employment outcomes for students with disabilities.

### **PDE Obj 5.C: Students in Ac 26 Categories**

By June 2025, include annual counts of students served in each Act 26 category in OVR quarterly reports, broken down by county.

## **Goal 6: Promote Self-Advocacy and Leadership Skills**

Empower students with disabilities to develop self-advocacy and leadership skills, enabling them to lead their meetings, understand their accommodation needs, and effectively disclose their disabilities for job success.

### **PDE Obj 6.A: Self-Advocacy Curriculum**

By June 2025, develop and implement a self-advocacy curriculum, ensuring that 75% of students with disabilities lead their meetings, advocate for themselves, and understand the accommodations they need for job success by December 2025 and 100% by June 2026.

### **PDE Obj 6.B: Disability Disclosure**

By June 2025, provide training and resources to support students in disclosing their disabilities and identifying necessary accommodations for job success, aiming for at least 75% participation by December 2025 and 100% by June 2026.

### **PDE Obj 6.C: Monitor Self-Advocacy Skill Development**

By June 2025, establish a monitoring system to report on self-advocacy skill development during school and 12 months post-graduation, with annual reports to track progress and effectiveness.

## **Goal 7: Ensure Comprehensive Transition Support**

Provide thorough and individualized transition support for students with disabilities, ensuring they have access to benefits counseling, competitive integrated employment, post-secondary education placements, or plans for services through relevant programs before they leave high school.

### **PDE Obj 7.A: Referral to Benefits Counseling**

By December 2024, refer all students with disabilities likely to rely on Medical Assistance and Medicaid-funded Home and Community-Based Service waivers to a WIPA program for benefits counseling before they leave high school, aiming for 100% referral by June 2025.

### **PDE Obj 7.B: Post High-School Plans**

By June 2025, ensure that 100% of students with an IEP leaving high school have a competitive integrated job, a post-secondary education placement, or a plan in place with OVR, ODP, or OLTL-funded programs for services leading to competitive integrated employment or



post-secondary education. Monitor and report on this metric semi-annually to ensure compliance and address any gaps.

## Summary of Findings

### **Progress in Employment First Initiatives at PDE**

PDE has made significant strides in supporting students with disabilities through Employment First, including increased participation in transition programs, steady competitive integrated employment (CIE) outcomes, and strong collaborations like "Connecting for Employment." The demand for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) reflects PDE's dedication to preparing students for successful post-graduation outcomes.

### **Lack of Longitudinal Data on Restrictive Settings**

There is no longitudinal data tracking students moving from inclusive to restrictive settings, limiting efforts to monitor segregation trends and address the causes behind these transitions.

### **Insufficient Data on Post-Secondary Placements**

Data on post-secondary placements for students with IEPs is insufficient, hindering a full assessment of transition services and post-graduation outcomes beyond CIE.

### **Incomplete Reporting on Dropout Rates**

Current dropout data does not distinguish students with disabilities, making it hard to target interventions to prevent early school departures.

### **Absence of Comprehensive Annual Counts of Pre-ETS Recipients**

While quarterly reports exist, there is no comprehensive annual count of unduplicated Pre-ETS recipients, affecting the assessment of service reach and impact.

## Recommendations (Rec)

### **PDE Rec A: Establish Baseline Data for Transition Settings**

Given the complexity of measuring how students transition to more or less-restrictive settings across different school levels, it is recommended that PDE establish baseline Point-in-Time (PIT) data by January 15, 2025. This baseline data should identify student movements between inclusive and segregated settings during key educational transitions (e.g., elementary to middle school, middle to

high school). Analyzing this data annually will help PDE identify trends, understand the factors driving these transitions, and implement targeted interventions to maintain students in the least restrictive environments. We recommend accelerating the collection of longitudinal data on students transitioning from inclusive to more restrictive settings during key educational transitions. This data should be analyzed and reported annually to identify trends and factors contributing to these transitions.

### **PDE Rec B: Expand and Improve Post-Secondary Outcome Tracking**

Implement comprehensive tracking and reporting systems for post-secondary placements and plans for students with IEPs, including both employment and education outcomes. This will provide a clearer picture of how well transition services prepare students for life after high school and identify areas where additional support may be needed.

### **PDE Rec C: Targeted Approach to Reducing Dropout Rates Among Students with Disabilities**

Dropout rates for students with disabilities are a critical indicator of future success. Addressing this issue early can improve long-term outcomes in both education and employment. Begin disaggregating dropout data specifically for students with disabilities and develop targeted interventions to reduce these rates. This should include identifying at-risk students no later than year 10 of high school and providing additional support to maintain a strong path to graduation.

### **PDE Rec D: Disaggregate and Enhance Act 26 Data Reporting**

Disaggregated data will allow PDE to identify disparities in educational and employment outcomes across different types of schools and locations, leading to more targeted and effective policy interventions. Publish Act 26 data disaggregated by educational settings (cyber schools, brick-and-mortar schools) and by LEA. Additionally, include annual counts of students served under each Act 26 category.

### **PDE Rec E: Increase Access to Financial Literacy and Benefits Counseling**

Integrate financial education into IEP transition services and ensure that all students with disabilities are referred to Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) programs before leaving high school. Financial literacy and benefits counseling are essential for empowering

students with disabilities to achieve economic independence and successfully transition to employment.

**PDE Rec F: Promote Inclusive Educational Practices Across All School Settings**

Inclusive educational environments lead to better outcomes for students with disabilities, including higher rates of CIE. By promoting inclusivity, PDE can help ensure that all students receive the support they need to succeed. Provide targeted professional development for educators on inclusive practices, particularly in regions with higher rates of segregation. Ensure that all schools have the resources needed to implement these practices effectively.

## **Labor and Industry (L&I) and OVR**

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### **Abstract and Role in Employment First**

The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is a leading agency that supports Pennsylvanians with disabilities in achieving their employment and professional development goals. OVR's website states, "The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation provides vocational rehabilitation services to help persons with disabilities prepare for, obtain, or maintain employment." OVR offers a comprehensive array of services, including diagnostic services, vocational evaluation, vocational counseling, benefits counseling, training and education, restorative services, placement assistance, assistive technology, and support services. Consequently, OVR is crucial in promoting Pennsylvania's Employment First initiatives.

### **Employment First Progress (as reported in department self-assessment)**

#### **OVR**

Progress with the development of OVR's SWTCIE Grant. The InVEST Project has continued to be steady. The goal of this \$13.9M model demonstration grant is to assist individuals who are engaged in, or may be considering, transition from SMW to CIE.

OVR currently is required to reserve and invest a minimum of 15% of federal VR grant (estimate of \$20M annually) on Pre-ETS to students with disabilities. OVR has invested and will continue to invest significant resources into the transition population to enable students with disabilities to enter the competitive labor market and through services including supporting post-secondary education, variety of Project Search sites, supported employment, etc.

### **Agency Goal and Objectives (Obj.)**

#### **Goal 1: Transition from Section 14(c) Wage Employment to CIE**

The goal is to transition 25% of individuals currently employed under Section 14(c) to Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) by implementing strategic actions and closely monitoring progress. This will be achieved through tailored Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs), collaboration with ODP or CHC, WIPA consultations, and consistent communication throughout the SWTCIE Grant. Progress will

be measured by tracking the number of individuals moving to CIE, aiming to reach the target by the end of the grant period. Resources like the SWTCIE Grant and existing partnerships will be leveraged to ensure achievable outcomes, with quarterly reports ensuring continuous improvement and accountability. This initiative directly supports OVR's mission of enhancing employment opportunities and will be completed by December 2027, with progress assessments starting in January 2024.

### **Goal 2: Measure the effectiveness of Pre-ETS**

In collaboration with BSE, a structured electronic evaluation system will be implemented for Pre-ETS, incorporating pre- and post-intervention assessments, long-term outcome tracking, and stakeholder feedback collection to measure changes in student skills, knowledge, and employment experiences. The goal is to ensure that 90% of students complete both pre- and post-assessments, achieve a 70% response rate for long-term outcome surveys six months after the program, and collect feedback from at least 80% of stakeholders, including students, parents, educators, and employers. To achieve this, collaboration with School Transition Counselors, OVR staff, and stakeholders will be essential to effectively integrate assessments and feedback into the program. This initiative aligns with the objective of measuring and improving the effectiveness of Pre-ETS to meet the needs of students and stakeholders. The assessment and feedback system will be implemented by the end of the current academic year, with initial data analysis completed within three months and a full report finalized by October 2026.

### **Goal 3: Speedy Service Delivery**

The goal is to improve the speed and efficiency of IPE development by reducing application processing time and enhancing staff productivity through targeted training and technology implementation. Specifically, the objective is to reduce the average application processing time to 25 business days and ensure 95% of all applications are processed within 30 business days. This will be accomplished through improved staff training, increased automation of service delivery processes, and enhanced client communication. Progress will be measured by tracking the average processing time, the percentage of applications processed within 25 business days, the number of pending applications, staff proficiency improvements, the percentage of automated processes, and client satisfaction scores. Quarterly staff training sessions will be

conducted to enhance efficiency, and advanced technology solutions will be deployed to automate at least 50% of service delivery processes while improving communication protocols to ensure timely client interactions. These efforts are relevant to improving client satisfaction and operational efficiency, aligning with organizational goals for service excellence. The improvements will be implemented over 12 months, with monthly monitoring of application processing times, quarterly evaluations of staff training, and bi-annual assessments of technology impact and client satisfaction.

## **OVR Recommendations:**

### **Rec 1: Dedicated Resources**

Dedicate specific efforts and resources to improve employment outcomes for students with disabilities graduating high school, aiming to increase the percentage of Act 26 Cases closed in “Placed in Employment” status.

### **Rec 2: Collaboration between OVR and BSE**

OVR and the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) should collaborate more to support IDEA requirements, providing better outreach and education to transition-age youth and their families about options under WIOA and IDEA.

### **Rec 3: Credential Attainment Reporting**

Identify credential attainment similarly to other states to provide comparable data per the RSA Credential Attainment Process. Adopt best practices from other states to improve Pennsylvania’s credential attainment ranking.

### **Rec 4: Investigate 911 Data:**

Develop investigative strategies to understand the 911 exit data, particularly for those unable to be located or no longer interested in employment services, to improve outcomes for this segment of customers.

## **L&I Recommendations**

### **L&I Rec. 1: Promote Workforce Development Funds**

The goal is to increase awareness and access to Workforce Development funds designated for advancing Employment First initiatives, specifically for individuals with disabilities. To achieve this,

a targeted promotional campaign will be developed and implemented to raise awareness about these funds among individuals with disabilities and their support networks. Success will be measured by a 30% increase in inquiries and applications for Workforce Development funds from individuals with disabilities within 12 months of the campaign's launch. This will be accomplished by leveraging multiple communication channels such as social media, email newsletters, webinars, and partnerships with disability advocacy groups to effectively reach the target audience. Promoting these funds is crucial for empowering individuals with disabilities to access resources that support their employment goals, aligning with the broader mission of advancing Employment First initiatives. The campaign will be launched within 3 months and is expected to achieve the targeted increase in inquiries and applications within 12 months. A mid-campaign review will be conducted at the 6-month mark to assess progress and adjust strategies as needed.

## **L&I Rec. 2: Civil Service Reform**

The goal is to amend the Civil Service Reform Act to establish a Schedule A-like program and customized employment in state jobs for people with disabilities, and to ensure effective implementation through education and partnerships. Specifically, the amendment will create a Schedule A-like program that enables individuals with disabilities to be hired into state jobs without going through the usual competitive process. Additionally, state departments will be educated about the benefits and implementation of customized employment and the new program, with OVR as a key partner. Success will be measured by the passage of the amendment within 12 months, conducting training sessions for at least 80% of state departments within 6 months of the amendment's passage, and achieving a 15% increase in the number of people with disabilities hired under the new program within the first year. This will be accomplished through collaboration with legislative bodies, state departments, and OVR to draft and advocate for the amendment, as well as developing and delivering comprehensive training materials and sessions. Reforming the Civil Service Act to support the hiring of people with disabilities aligns with the broader goal of promoting inclusive employment practices and expanding opportunities within the state workforce. The amendment should be secured by December 2025, educational outreach completed by June 2026, and the impact on hiring rates

measured by December 2026, with quarterly reviews to track progress and adjust strategies as needed.

### **L&I Rec. 3: Pre-Employment Transition Services**

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is required to allocate at least 15% of its federal Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) grant, approximately \$20 million annually, to Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students with disabilities. OVR has made substantial investments in helping these students transition into the competitive job market, including creating nearly 1,000 work-based learning experiences for summer 2024. Currently, 53% of OVR's VR program customers are under the age of 25; given OVR's total budget of around \$200 million, a considerable portion of its VR and Pre-ETS funding supports students and young adults with disabilities across various services, including post-secondary education, Project Search sites, and supported employment.

### **L&I Rec. 4: Greater collaboration between OVR and BSE to for Transition Age Youth**

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) was awarded a \$9.99 million Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Pathways to Partnership (P2P) grant, which will run from October 2023 to September 2028. This grant, in collaboration with Centers for Independent Living (CILs), the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), local education agencies, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), aims to strengthen partnerships to increase the independence of students with disabilities. The funds will be used to develop professional training, implement Transition Discoveries, and create work-based learning opportunities for students.

OVR, the Bureau of Special Education (BSE), and ODP are also advancing the Connecting 4 Employment initiative, meeting weekly to assess resources and build relationships. Regional teams will receive training on Charting the LifeCourse principles for transition planning.

Additionally, OVR continues to offer Mobile Fab Lab services throughout the state, including at events like the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Summer Academy and the PA Transition Conference. OVR collaborates with local schools through district offices, attending IEP meetings, job fairs, and parent nights, leading to referrals for various programs, including MY Work, the Hiram G. Andrews Center, and broader VR services.



## **L&I Rec. 5: Comparable Credential Attainment**

OVR is continuing to implement its Rapid and Sustained Engagement strategy, focusing on moving cases quickly through the application, eligibility, and plan development process. The goal is to keep customers engaged throughout the life of their case to improve overall outcomes and meet key federal performance indicators. OVR closely monitors office statistics on case movement and service provision, and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) reviews this data quarterly. A significant challenge remains in obtaining documentation for Credential Attainment and Measurable Skills Gain, as tracking down high school diplomas from customers and unresponsive schools has created an administrative burden. With many school districts across Pennsylvania, this impacts OVR's performance reporting. As these indicators are required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), OVR is committed to improving its performance in these areas.

## **L&I Rec. 6: Speed to OVR Service Delivery**

Pennsylvania's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is required by the Rehabilitation Act to determine a customer's eligibility for services within 60 days of application and to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) within 90 days of the eligibility determination. While these are the minimum standards, OVR encourages staff to make these decisions as quickly as possible, based on available disability documentation. Rapid engagement in vocational rehabilitation services has been a national focus, and OVR has reinforced this initiative across the agency through guidance, training, and setting clear expectations. The agency is continuously seeking improvements in its systems and processes to ensure timely service delivery, as early engagement increases the likelihood of sustained participation and successful outcomes for customers.

## **L&I Rec. 7: 911 Data**

This issue of customer disengagement is a common challenge nationwide in vocational rehabilitation reporting. To address this, OVR has implemented Rapid and Sustained Engagement strategies, along with staff training and monitoring over the past two years, to improve customer engagement. Despite these efforts, it remains difficult for OVR to engage with customers who stop responding to inquiries. OVR follows a standard protocol before closing cases, which requires at

least two contact attempts, one of which must be in writing, before proceeding with case closure.

### **L&I Rec. 8: Promoted Workforce Development's Designated Funds**

Workforce (WF) and OVR can further enhance their collaboration by sharing grant announcements through their social media platforms and listservs. Both organizations already work together on several initiatives and aim to expand their partnerships. The OVR Executive Director is a member of the Statewide Workforce Board, while an OVR district manager sits on each local workforce development board. At PA CareerLink® centers, OVR and WF staff work together to provide direct support to individuals with disabilities, helping to reduce barriers to employment and education. OVR also has Business Service Representatives who participate in PA CareerLink® Business Services meetings to coordinate employer connections. Additionally, OVR actively participates in the Governor's Advisory Council for Veteran Services, focusing on strategic service delivery for veterans with disabilities.

### **L&I Rec. 9: Amend the Civil Service Reform Act to establish a Schedule A like program**

OVR fully supports the creation of a program in Pennsylvania that would replicate the Federal Schedule A hiring program, which provides employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. However, responsibility for implementing such a program should be assigned to the Governor's Office or the Office of Administration, as it would require amendments to the Civil Service Act and various other HR changes under their management. OVR is willing to consult on this initiative, as the disability community has long advocated for such a program.

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## **Other Agencies/Departments**

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### **Role in Employment First**

State agencies play a crucial role in the Employment First movement by shaping policies, programs, and services that either support or hinder employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. In Pennsylvania, agencies like the Department of Health (DOH), Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), Department of Aging (DOA), Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) and Department of Corrections (DOC) are collaborating to align their operations with the movement's principles, focusing on competitive integrated employment as the preferred outcome. These efforts include removing barriers and promoting inclusive practices. Additionally, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission is assessing the impact of discrimination on education and employment to inform future policies. Through these collaborations, Pennsylvania's state agencies are advancing the Employment First movement and promoting inclusive employment opportunities for all.

### **Employment First Progress (as reported in department self-assessment)**

#### **Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)**

Participated in COPA programs to increase the number of people with disabilities employed by COPA; ensure promotion of CIE in programs; and work with Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion (DEBI) Director.

#### **Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA)**

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) and the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) are collaborating on a pilot program aimed at filling difficult-to-hire Non-Civil Service roles. DMVA has identified various potential positions across the state. During the summer of 2024, 23 interns from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) were hired, but there were more job openings than qualified candidates available. The Bureau of Enterprise Recruitment (BER) convened with management from the Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEOO) to explore methods for

enhancing the accessibility of job descriptions for essential functions. A coordinator from BER attended to gather insights for Office of Administration (OA) training initiatives.

DMVA HR received guidance that disability counselors can help candidates determine if they are able to complete functions on position description rather than agency trying to find applicable positions. DMVA is also working with OA on OVR pilot.

DMVA is working with the OA to identify hard to fill positions for OVR Pilot.

### **Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA)**

The Department of Aging has integrated Employment First strategies into the Aging Our Way, PA plan, focusing on creating flexible jobs and workplace accommodations for older adults. They are working with the Department of Labor and Industry to increase funding for vocational rehabilitation and make job searches easier through PA CareerLink®. The Aging Our Way, PA plan, published in May 2024, is a key resource for improving job opportunities for older adults, including those with disabilities.

### **Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)**

PennDOT continues to work with county transit agencies to improve the Rural Transportation Program for people with disabilities. From 2021 to 2023, the Find My Ride program has seen steady growth in applications, with 62-63% of trips consistently being used by people with disabilities.

### **Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA)**

The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) offers an online housing search tool with filters for accessibility needs and participates in the HUD Section 811 PRA Program to support integrated housing for people with disabilities. They also ensure rental properties with accessible units remain compliant and provide financial education programs like Building Your Financial House webinars and homebuyer courses.

### **Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC)**

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) is hosting its Second Annual Disability Conference and releasing documents and press releases about disability rights and related legal cases. They are

also working to identify best practices for investigating disability cases efficiently and are focused on raising public awareness about the rights of people with disabilities to encourage more individuals to seek support from the agency.

## **Goals and Objectives**

### **Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)**

#### **Goal 1: Integrate Employment First Principles into Economic Development Programs**

Ensure that economic development initiatives explicitly support the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in community and economic growth efforts across Pennsylvania.

**Objective 1.A:** By December 2025, DCED will develop and implement 3 specific Employment First initiatives within its community development programs, aiming to increase job opportunities for individuals with disabilities in both urban and rural areas.

**Objective 1.B:** By June 2025, DCED will establish partnerships with at least 3 statewide workforce development boards and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to ensure that individuals with disabilities are actively included in all economic development projects, with formal agreements (MOUs) in place.

**Objective 1.C:** By September 2025, DCED will create and launch 2 pilot projects focused on promoting entrepreneurship among individuals with disabilities, ensuring that these initiatives are closely monitored for participation and success rates.

#### **Goal 2: Enhance Service Delivery and Customer Satisfaction Tracking**

Develop and implement systems to track the timely delivery of services and assess customer satisfaction, particularly for services provided to individuals with disabilities.

**Objective 2A.** By June 2025, DCED will implement a service delivery tracking system that monitors the timeliness of economic development services provided to all participants, including the development and distribution of a customer satisfaction survey tailored to individuals with disabilities, with the collected feedback used to continuously improve service delivery.

**Objective 2.B:** By December 2025, DCED will establish a feedback loop that includes regular consultations with disability advocacy groups to ensure that the needs and concerns of individuals with disabilities are being addressed in all community and economic development programs.

### **Goal 3: Promote Inclusive Economic Development Practices**

Strengthen DCED's commitment to inclusivity by ensuring that all economic development practices are accessible and beneficial to individuals with disabilities.

**Objective 3.A:** By December 2025, DCED will develop inclusive economic development guidelines that require all funded projects to demonstrate how they will support individuals with disabilities, with compliance monitored through regular audits.

**Objective 3.B:** By June 2025, DCED will train at least 100 staff members and key stakeholders on inclusive economic development practices, ensuring that these principles are embedded in everyday operations and decision-making.

**Objective 3.C:** By September 2025, DCED will publish an annual report detailing the progress of inclusive economic development initiatives, including metrics on the participation and success of individuals with disabilities in DCED programs.

## **Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA)**

### **Goal 1: Improve Employment Services for Veterans with Disabilities**

Facilitate the creation of competitive, integrated employment opportunities and provide tailored support for veterans with disabilities through thought leadership and collaboration with state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector.

**Objective 1.A:** By December 31, 2025, the DMVA will collaborate with OVR, the Department of Labor and Industry (L&I), and relevant nonprofits to develop four strategic Employment First goals and advocate for measures that support veterans with disabilities in securing employment.

**Objective 1.B:** By December 2025, the DMVA will support the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) in creating and launching 3

employment-focused initiatives by providing thought leadership, facilitating connections through MOUs.

**Objective 1.C:** By June 2025, the DMVA will engage with statewide workforce development boards to enhance employment opportunities for veterans by developing and implementing 3 new strategies.

## **Goal 2: Strengthen Resource Networks for Veterans**

Enhance resource connections and service utilization for veterans with disabilities by expanding outreach efforts and facilitating stakeholder collaboration

**Objective 2.A:** By June 2025, the DMVA will expand the PA VETConnect program to improve connections between veterans with disabilities and available employment resources, increasing the program's reach and effectiveness.

**Objective 2.B:** By December 2024, the DMVA will collaborate with the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) and other partners to raise awareness and utilization of veteran employment services among Pennsylvania veterans with service-connected disabilities by 15%. This will be achieved through joint outreach campaigns and participation in resource fairs, utilizing existing networks and partnerships to reach more veterans.

## **Goal 3: Data-Driven Strategies for Veteran Employment**

Promote data-driven strategies to improve the effectiveness of veteran employment programs in collaboration with other state agencies.

**Objective 3. A:** By December 2025, the DMVA will work with L&I and other agencies to advocate for and support implementing systems to track timely delivery of services for successful employment outcomes for veterans with disabilities.

## **Department of Aging (DOA)**

### **Goal 1: Support Employment Opportunities for Older Adults with Disabilities**

Leverage the Aging Our Way, PA strategic plan to enhance employment and occupational opportunities for older adults, including those with disabilities, through collaboration with relevant agencies.

**Objective 1.A:** By December 2025, DOA will support DLI in implementing Barrier Remediation subgoals from the 2024-2028

Pennsylvania Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan to strengthen workplace flexibilities, enabling at least a 15% increase in employment retention for older adults with disabilities who wish to continue working.

**Objective 1.B:** By June 2025, DOA will collaborate with DLI and OVR to expand outreach efforts, aiming to increase the number of older adults with disabilities receiving supported employment services by 5% and enhancing awareness of available vocational services.

**Objective 1.C:** By September 2025, DOA will assist in the redesign of PA CareerLink filters to include customizable job search options tailored to older adults, with a goal of increasing job search success rates for this demographic by 25%

**Objective 1.D:** By June 2025, DOA will contribute to the enhancement of the Labor and Industry Older Workers by Industry Dashboard by advocating for the inclusion of more specific older adult age groups, aiming to raise awareness of the economic contributions of older adults by 30%.

## **Goal 2: Enhance the PA Link as a Resource for Employment**

Redesign and expand the PA Link to serve as a comprehensive resource for older adults and individuals with disabilities, including referrals to employment opportunities.

**Objective 2.A:** By December 2025, DOA will complete the refresh and redesign of the PA Link to include a user-friendly interface and a robust referral system for employment opportunities, aiming to increase employment referrals by 40% for older adults and individuals with disabilities.

**Objective 2.B:** By June 2025, DOA will integrate employment-related resources into the PA Link, ensuring that 100% of PA Link users are provided with information on flexible job opportunities and vocational support services.

**Objective 2.C:** By March 2025, DOA will collaborate with community partners to promote the PA Link as a central hub for employment information, targeting a 50% increase in community engagement and resource utilization among older adults with disabilities.

## **Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)**

### **Goal 1: Enhance Transportation Accessibility for Employment**



Focus on improving transportation options for individuals with disabilities to ensure equitable access to employment opportunities, using PennDOT's available resources.

**Objective 1.A:** By December 2025, PennDOT will work with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to promote the Driving with Bioptics program. This will help increase the number of people with disabilities who get driver's licenses by 10%. PennDOT will focus on outreach and sharing data, while OVR will handle customer coordination.

**Objective 1.B:** By June 2025, PennDOT will collaborate with OVR to promote the Dual Control Permit program. The goal is to enroll 100 individuals with medical conditions in adaptive driving training. PennDOT will concentrate on raising awareness, and OVR will lead the training efforts.

**Objective 1.C:** By June 2025, PennDOT will increase the visibility of the People with Disabilities (PWD) Shared Ride Program by 15%, specifically focusing on employment-related trips.

## **Goal 2: Improve Transportation Models for Rural and Non-Traditional Work Shifts**

Improve transportation models to better serve rural areas and non-traditional work shifts.

**Objective 2.A:** By June 2025, PennDOT will collaborate with local transit agencies to pilot on-demand transportation services in 3 rural areas. The focus will be on expanding scheduling options using current resources, without adding new funding.

**Objective 2.B:** By December 2025, PennDOT will collaborate with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to explore transportation models for Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) participants, helping them access employment opportunities. PennDOT will support the initiative, while DHS manages the program.

**Objective 2.C:** PennDOT will meet with the Employment First Oversight Commission twice a year to review progress, discuss transportation plans, and adjust strategies as needed.

## **Department of Corrections (DOC)**

### **Goal 1: Enhance Vocational Training and Employment Services**

Develop and implement targeted vocational training and employment initiatives in collaboration with key agencies to support individuals with disabilities in correctional facilities.

**Objective 1.A:** By December 2025, the DOC will develop and implement 3 specific Employment First initiatives tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities in correctional facilities.

**Objective 1.B:** By June 2025, the DOC will establish 5 partnerships and MOUs with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to enhance employment-focused education and training, ensuring these initiatives support skill development for lifelong careers.

## **Goal 2: Improve Data Collection and Outcome Tracking**

Establish comprehensive tracking and data analysis systems to monitor and enhance the effectiveness of employment programs for individuals with disabilities in correctional facilities.

**Objective 2.A:** By August 2025, the Department of Corrections (DOC) will implement tracking systems to monitor the successful outcomes of employment initiatives for individuals with disabilities.

**Objective 2.B:** By December 2025, the DOC will utilize data from these tracking systems to generate and review 6 reports identifying opportunities for improvement and measuring the impact of vocational programs on employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, focusing on the unique challenges of this population.

## **Recommendations (Rec)**

Based on the self-assessment report received from the following agencies, the EFOC recommends the following:

### **Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)**

**Current Status:** The DCED lacks specific EF goals but promotes competitive integrated employment (CIE) and seeks to be a model employer.

#### **Recommendations:**

**Offer Business Incentives:** Give tax breaks or grants to companies that hire people with disabilities.

**Create Local Programs:** Work with local businesses to offer internships and apprenticeships for people with disabilities.

Increase Inclusive Hiring: Set targets to hire more people with disabilities within the department and encourage other businesses to do the same.

### **Department of Aging (DOA)**

Current Status: The DOA did not set specific EFOC goals but expressed a desire to enhance employment flexibility and increase opportunities for older adults with disabilities.

#### **Recommendations:**

Offer Flexible Jobs: Create programs that offer flexible work options for older adults, especially those with disabilities.

Provide Job Training: Work with other state agencies to provide training that helps older adults learn the skills they need for today's jobs.

Make Job Searches Easier: Ensure job search websites are accessible to older adults with disabilities, with filters to help find jobs that offer accommodations.

Educate Employers: Teach employers about the benefits of hiring older adults and people with disabilities, encouraging them to hire inclusively.

### **Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)**

Current Status: While PennDOT continues to work with county transit agencies, no EF-specific goals were listed. They focus on improving rural transportation for persons with disabilities (PWD).

#### **Recommendations:**

Expand Transit Services: Work with local agencies to make public transportation more accessible for people with disabilities, especially in rural areas.

Collaborate on EF Initiatives: Partner with disability organizations to ensure transportation policies help people with disabilities get to work.

Monitor Use: Track how many people with disabilities use transportation services and use that data to make improvements.

### **Department of Corrections (DOC)**

Current Status: Not much detail is provided about DOC's current EF goals or efforts.

**Recommendations:**

Support Reentry for People with Disabilities: Create programs to help people with disabilities find jobs after leaving prison, working with vocational services.

Improve Workplace Accessibility: Make sure that employees with disabilities working in the corrections system have proper accommodations.

Job Training for Inmates: Partner with schools to provide job training for inmates with disabilities to help them find work when they are released.

**Department of Health (DOH)**

Current Status: The DOH did not provide Employment First (EFOC) goals, but they focus on addressing social determinants of health and health inequities through various programs.

**Recommendations:**

Set Clear EF Goals: The DOH should set specific goals to hire more people with disabilities, especially in healthcare jobs.

Create Employment Programs: Use existing health plans to create jobs for people with disabilities in public health roles.

Track Progress: Start tracking the number of people with disabilities hired and report this information regularly.

Raise Awareness: Run programs to educate healthcare providers on the benefits of hiring people with disabilities.

## Appendices

### Appendix A. Commissioners Names and Biographies

**Josie Badger** DHCE, CRC, Commission Chair. Dr. Badger received her bachelor's degree from Geneva College in Disability Law and Advocacy, a master's from the University of Pittsburgh in Rehabilitation Counseling, and a Doctorate from Duquesne University in Healthcare Ethics. She founded J. Badger Consulting Inc. in 2014 and PEACOCK, a nonprofit organization in 2023. Dr. Badger is also the Director of the national RSA-Parent Training, Information, technical assistance center (RAISE). Dr. Badger was a founder of the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network (PYLN), the Children's Hospital Advocacy Network for Guidance and Empowerment (CHANGE) and created a youth and leadership development training program that serviced all of Pennsylvania. It is the campaign manager of the United Way of Southwestern PA's #IWantToWork Campaign and co-chair of the statewide Family Care Coalition.

**Julia Barol**, Commission Vice Chair is at Temple University Institute on Disabilities working on employment systems issues. She is also President of Transition Consults where her work focuses on giving people the opportunity to live and work in their community, self-directing their lives. She is President of the Pennsylvania chapter of APSE (Association of People Supporting Employment First) and has been working to advance Employment First in Pennsylvania since 2012. She serves as the Chair of Transition and Education of the PA Vocational Rehabilitation Council. Julia was a part of the initial cohort of the BPAOs and the roll out of the TWWIIA and was certified as a benefits counselor in 2001. She has counseled many hundreds on work and its impact on benefits so that people can make informed decisions about their future. She has trained groups on work incentives, SSA benefits, and healthcare options for many years. Julia holds a Masters in Secondary Special Education and Transition from The George Washington University.

**Dale Verchick**, Commission Secretary, has been an advocate at Disability Rights Pennsylvania since 2008. She and her family were refugees during the Persian Gulf War and were forced to relocate to India. Dale is now a US citizen and resides in Schuylkill County with her husband and their two children, Andrew, and Lucy. Lucy was born with congenital femoral deficiency and fibular hemimelia. Dale serves on the Board of the Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation.

She co-authored the book "NRI - The Improbable Adventures of a Non-Resident Indian," which explores the experiences of non-resident Indians navigating life between different countries and cultures. Dale holds a master's degree in law and public policy from PennWest University.

**Stephen Suroviec**, Immediate Past Commission Chair, is President and Chief Executive Officer of Achieva. Before joining Achieva in January 2018, Steve held several disability-related positions in both the public and non-profit sectors, including Chief Operating Officer and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Division Director for the Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association, Special Advisor to the PA Secretary of Human Services (for "Employment First" policy), Deputy Secretary for Developmental Programs, Executive Director for the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Executive Director of The Arc of PA, Deputy Secretary and Policy Director at the PA Department of Health, and Director of the Erie County Department of Human Services. He was a Legislative Assistant for then-Congressman Tom Ridge from 1991 through 1994 and served on the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities from 2006 to 2008. Steve is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force and holds a master's degree in Public and International Affairs from the University of Pittsburgh.

**Mary Hartley** (Inaugural Chair of the Commission) is President of the Arc of Greater Pittsburgh, formerly the Executive Director of Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership (PEAL). She has led statewide policy and legislative change as well as projects supporting transition to adulthood and employment, most notably, the self-advocate managed #IWantToWork campaign at United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania. With United Way and county leadership, she initiated and launched a successful new model of employment collaboration (now in multiple businesses), the Career Transition Project. Mary is a parent advocate who got her start volunteering with the Local Task Force on the Right to Education. She lives with her husband and two children in Pittsburgh; her son is advocating on his own behalf through transition.

**Lisa Biggica** is the President/CEO of UniqueSource Products & Services, a network of organizations affirmatively employing people with disabilities who prioritize providing adaptive technologies, effective accommodations, and supports to not only meet, but exceed the requirements of the ADA. UniqueSource provides the Central Non-

Profit operating under Section 520 of the PA Procurement Code. In 2021 Lisa was named, and continues to serve, as the President of the national State Use Program Association (SUPRA), providing a consolidated source of information, education, and support for State Use Program leaders nationwide. Lisa holds a B.S. in Business Administration from Elizabethtown College and Project Management Certifications from Villanova University. In addition to Lisa's work in advancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities, she has an extensive background in business leadership, financial services, and digital customer service operations.

**Cheryl Bates-Harris** is a Senior Disability Advocacy Specialist for the Training and Advocacy Support Center (TASC) of NDRN where she has 23 years of experience and expertise working with people with disabilities. She has an in-depth knowledge of cross disability issues and focuses on employment issues of people with disabilities, including Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Security and Return to Work (PABSS), and other work programs that impact people with disabilities, including DOL OneStops. Since the passage of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act, she has conducted national training on TWWIIA and Vocational Rehabilitation Services and has conducted extensive training on the intersection issues of the Ticket to Work with state vocational rehab services. She was appointed by President Bush to the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Advisory panel in 2004. A prime impetus behind Segregated and Exploited; the Failure of the DD System to Provide Meaningful Work, she provides training and technical assistance to the protection and advocacy and Client Assistance Programs nationwide and has been an invited speaker at many national conferences.

**Cindy Duch** is the Director of Individual Assistance at the PEAL Center. In addition to her work at the PEAL Center, Cindy is a 20-year-old member of the Local Task Force 3 (LTF3) for the Right to Education. Cindy is a former member of the PA Rehabilitation Council and a current member of the OVR- Pittsburgh District Office Citizen Advisory Council. She is a Commissioner on the PA Employment First Oversight Commission. Cindy also serves as a peer monitor assisting the PA Department of Education/Bureau of Special Education in monitoring the Special Education Departments of School Districts in Pennsylvania. Additionally, she represents PEAL on the Office for Dispute Resolution Stakeholder Council. Cindy lives in Allegheny

County with her husband Jim and their two sons. She has a B.S.B.A. in Economics from Robert Morris University.

**Richard S. Edley, PhD**, is the lead executive for the Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA) in Pennsylvania, one of the largest state trade associations in the country representing providers of mental health, drug and alcohol, intellectual and developmental disabilities, children's, brain injury, medical rehabilitation, and physical disabilities and aging services. The association includes over 350 members. His professional career began in 1988 and prior to leading the association he was President and CEO of PerformCare/Community Behavioral HealthCare Network of Pennsylvania (CBHNP), a national, full-service, behavioral health managed care organization. Most recently, Dr. Edley was named to the Board of Directors of the National Council, a Washington DC based organization representing behavioral health providers and associations throughout the country. He also is a member of the PA Medical Assistance Advisory Committee (MAAC) and numerous other state task forces. Dr. Edley's baccalaureate degree is from Boston University, and he holds master's and doctorate degrees in clinical psychology from Emory University. He was an intern and post-doctoral fellow at McLean Hospital, where he held a faculty appointment at Harvard Medical School, Department of Psychiatry. Dr. Edley is a national presenter and is published in a broad variety of health care areas.

**Michele Leahy** is the founder and CEO of Leahy Life Plan, a firm dedicated to life planning for those with disabilities as well as their families. In 2009, Michele started her journey by obtaining her Certification in Work Incentive Planning through an approved Social Security Administration (SSA) program established through the SSA Ticket To Work Program. Ms. Leahy has an M.S. in Nonprofit Management from Eastern University and an B.A. in Communications, Division of Humanities, from Penn State. In 2019 Ms. Leahy was appointed by PA Governor Wolf to serve on the PA Rehabilitation Council (PaRC). Ms. Leahy was the first non-veteran Executive Board Member of the United Spinal Association, a national disability rights organization, where she served for over 8 years.

**State Representative Dan Miller.** As the eldest child of immigrant parents, Dan was the first member of his family born in America. Having a strong appreciation of the special opportunities America offers, he has made public service part of his life. He enlisted in the



Army National Guard after high school. While his military service was cut short due to injury, he found another way to engage in service. Dan was a volunteer firefighter with Mt. Lebanon Fire Department for 14 years and was elected as a municipal commissioner. Dan earned undergraduate degrees in education and history and a law degree from Catholic University. He was first a public defender focusing on juveniles and later was a county solicitor where he worked to make sure kids were safe in their homes and received a proper education. Dan was elected to the House of Representatives in 2013 and in 2020 he became Caucus Chair of the Democratic Caucus.

**Andrew Pennington** is the Deputy Director of the Pennsylvania Client Assistance Program (CAP). He is a council member of the PA Rehabilitation Council and serves on multiple Citizens Advisory Councils that meet to discuss potential barriers within the Vocational Rehabilitation Process at the district office level. He participates in the policy development process for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. He is an advocate for individual seeking services from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Centers for Independent Living, and programs, projects and facilities funded under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. He also provides individuals and programs training on services funded under the Act and Title 1 of the ADA throughout Pennsylvania.

**Susan Tachau** is the founder and recently retired CEO of Pennsylvania Assistive Technology (PATF), Pennsylvania's Alternative Financing Program as designated by the federal Assistive Technology Act. She is the founder and Vice President of the Board of Directors for Appalachian Assistive Technology Loan Fund (AATLF). Both AATLF and PATF are Community Development Financial Institutions. Susan is the co-author of many of PATF's publications, including the financial education curriculum, Cents and Sensibility: A Guide to Money Management and Funding Your Assistive Technology. Prior to her work at PATF, Susan was the policy director at the Institute on Disabilities, Temple University. Susan serves on several Boards of Directors including the PA Statewide Independent Living Council and the National Disability Finance Coalition. She received a B.A. from Colorado College, an M.A. from Rutgers University, and an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Colorado College. Susan and her husband are the parents of an adult son who has a disability and who lives in his own home and is employed as a policy advocate.

**Susan Miller Tomasic** graduated from Messiah (College) University with a B.S. in education. After more than a dozen years as a classroom teacher, Susan made a career change to corporate training coordination. Susan began working for the PA Statewide Independent Living Council, was later appointed by Gov. Rendell to the PA SILC board, and now serves as its chair. Susan has been an active advocate for the disability community at local, state, and national levels for more than 22 years. Susan, her husband, Frank, and their children, Jason, and Leah, reside in South Hanover Township, Pennsylvania.

**Heidi Tuszynski MS, NCC, LPC** is a person with a visual disability and resides in Erie, PA with her husband and daughter. She is a Nationally Certified Counselor and a Licensed Professional Counselor and holds a bachelor's degree in social work and master's in counseling. She has over 25 years of experience working for nonprofits in the Erie community working with grieving children, individuals who are visually impaired and blind, individuals with mental health issues, and advocating for parents and children with disabilities in the educational system. Heidi is the former Chair of the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council and a member of The Governor's Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities.

## **Appendix B. Glossary**

### **14C Certificate**

Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standard Act allows employers to apply to get a 14C Certificate. A business that has at 14C can pay their employees less than the minimum wage when their disabilities impair their productivity for the work being performed

### **2380 - Adult training facility or facility**

A place where services are given to four or more people who are 59 years old or younger and do not have a dementia-related disease. The services include helping with personal needs, daily activities, and providing activities to help them function better.

### **2390 - Vocational facility**

A place where people with disabilities go for part of the day to get job training or work that helps them learn new skills or get better at old

ones. It can be considered rehabilitative, habilitative or “handicapped employment” or employment training.

### **Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE):**

This means:

- Work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis
- Wage is at least the same rate as it would be for employees without a disability in the same position and is At least state or local minimum wage law
- Benefits are the same as for other employees.
- The workplace is at a location where the employee interacts with other persons who are not individuals with disabilities
- As appropriate, there are opportunities for advancement that are like those for other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who have similar positions.

### **Employment First**

The idea that Competitive Integrated Employment is the first consideration and preferred outcome for individuals with a disability.

### **Section 520 of the Procurement Code**

Under Section 520, companies that have a workforce where 75% of the direct labor is provided by employees with disabilities get state contracts for things they make or services they provide without having to compete with other companies. The state decides a fair price for these things through the PA Department of General Services (DGS).

## Appendix C. Employment First Cabinet Responsibilities

The Cabinet members should answer the question “Is this provision being implemented and if so, how?” for the following applicable requirements.

Applicable Department(s)	Employment First Act Section	Requirement(s)
Governor's Office	6(f)	Provide enough staff, supplies, and money to allow the Commission to perform its duties.
State and county agencies	4(a)	Competitive Integrated Employment should be the first choice for all people with disabilities who are eligible to work under federal or state laws, no matter how severe their disability is or the help they need.
	4(a)	Young people with disabilities should have work-based learning experiences.
	4(a)	Everyone with a disability who gets public services should have a chance to get help with finding a job, no matter if they live on their own or in a group home
	4(d)2	Agencies should recognize exceptional service providers that help people with disabilities find and keep CIE as "Employment Champions." These providers should display their commitment to Employment First and helping people with disabilities find and keep CIE. Employment champions will receive support to improve their employment services. A complete list of Employment Champions will

		be showcased on the State agencies' websites
	4(g)	Agencies should share data and information across systems to track Employment First progress. State agencies are encouraged to establish clear and measurable goals and objectives.
	4(h)(1)	All agencies should try to hire people with disabilities so that they make up at least 7% of the total state workforce.
	4(h)(2)	Every two years, state agencies should review their practices for hiring, jobs placement, and career advancement opportunities for Employment First effectiveness.
State and county organizations that offer publicly funded education, training, and services for working-age Pennsylvanians with disabilities	4(c)	Cross system collaboration should work to make sure that the programs, policies, and funding support people with disabilities to get Competitive integrated Employment (CIE).
	4(d)1	Agencies should review payment policies for providers and incentivize, when possible, providers who help people with disabilities find and keep CIE.
	4(e).	Ensure that staff understand and can abide by the policies of Employment First.
	4(f)	Agencies should create clear annual goals for CIE for people with disabilities. Each agency must annually evaluate their progress in achieving these goals. This information should be easy for the public to access and is posted on their official website.

Office of Administration	4(h)(4)	OA should maintain a system for people to voluntarily disclose their disability.
State and county agencies that provide publicly funded education, training, employment, and related services for working-age individuals with disabilities	4(j)	By October 1 <sup>st</sup> of each year, agencies will provide information based on subsections (f) and (g), and any other needed information to the Governor's Office of Policy and Planning for its annual report for the General Assembly. This report will show how state agencies are following this act and making improvements. The report must be given to the General Assembly by January 30th each year.

Cabinet	<p>5(c)(1)(i &amp; ii)  5(c)(2)(i, ii, &amp; iii)  5(d)  5(e)  .</p>	<p>The Cabinet should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Examine the current rules, policies, and steps connected to helping people with disabilities find community integrated employment,</li> <li>● Ensure that the descriptions of services, rules, and how payments are set are the same or match up in state agencies, both within each agency and between different agencies.</li> <li>● Create suggestions for changes in rules, guidelines, and steps that are needed to make sure that Employment First is put into action. These suggestions will go to the Governor, the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Human Services, the Secretary of Labor and Industry, the Secretary of Administration, and the Secretary of General Services.</li> <li>● Create suggestions for making sure that data is collected in an efficient way and can be shared in a way that can be enforced. These suggestions will be sent to the Governor, the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Human Services, the Secretary of Labor and Industry, the Secretary of Administration, and the Secretary of General Services.</li> <li>● Make recommendations to the Governor regarding changes in the law that are needed to support and put this act into action.</li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Promote collaboration among different state agencies, especially at the local and regional levels, while encouraging the development and adoption of agreements between local entities of these agencies to promote Employment First.</li><li>● Meet quarterly to create policies that ensure that all government departments follow the rules of Employment First.</li></ul>
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### **Appendix C: 2024 EFOC Report approval**

The following Commissioners voted in the affirmative to pass the 2024 Employment First Oversight Commission Report.

Josie Badger

Dale Verchick

Julia Barol

Lisa Biggica



Stephen Suroviec

Mary Hartley

Cindy Duch

Andrew Pennington

Michele Leahy

Heidi Tuszynski

Susan Tomasic

Richard Edley