



JB Pritzker, Governor

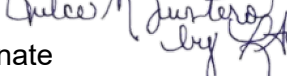
Dulce M. Quintero, Secretary Designate

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DATE: 5/2/2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable John F. Curran, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Don Harmon, Senate President
The Honorable Tony McCombie, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Emanuel "Chris" Welch, Speaker of the House

FROM: Dulce Quintero 
Secretary Designate
Illinois Department of Human Services

SUBJECT: **Economic and Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Task Force Annual Report (May 1, 2023- April 30, 2024)**

The Illinois Department of Human Services respectfully submits the Economic and Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Task Force Annual Report on behalf of the Illinois Department of Human Services- Division of Rehabilitation in order to fulfill the requirements set forth in Public Act 96-368.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Robyn L. Lewis, PhD., DRS Policy Advisor at robyn.lewis@illinois.gov, 217-606-9070.

cc: The Honorable JB Pritzker, Governor
John W. Hollman, Clerk of the House
Tim Anderson, Secretary of the Illinois Senate
Legislative Research Unit
State Government Report Center



STATE OF ILLINOIS

Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities (EEOPD) Taskforce Annual Report 2024

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

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I. EEOPD TASKFORCE MEMBERSHIP

State Government Representatives:

Ryan Croke, Illinois Governor's Office*

Bambi Bethel-Leitschuh, (Melissa Cory), Juvenile Justice

Chris Bond, Central Management Services

Casey Burke, IDHS-Division of Developmental Disabilities

Anna D'Ascenzo, Illinois Department of Employment Security

Melvin Harrison, Illinois Community College Board

Ahlam Jbara, IDHS-Division of Family and Community Services

Siobhan Johnson, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Lisa Jones, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

LaMetric Lane, Illinois State Board of Education

Maria Martinez-McKinley, (Kimberly Pinckney), IDHS-Division of Rehabilitation Services

Darius McKinney, IDHS-Division of Mental Health

Kimberly Mercer-Schleider, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities

Mariel Hamer-Sinclair, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities

Gabriela Moroney, Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services

Rafael Rivera, IDHS-Division of Substance Use Prevention and Recovery

Arthur Sutton, Illinois State Board of Higher Education

Public Appointed Members:

Maria Doughty, The Chicago Network*

Kathy Carmody, Institute on Public Policy for People with Disabilities

Josh Evans, Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities

Christina McGleam, Chicago's Mayors Office for People with Disabilities

Phil Milsk, Attorney and Public Policy Advocate

Benro Ogunyipe, Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission

Barry Taylor, Equip for Equality

Patty Walters, Developmental Services Center

Dennis Deany, Illinois Council for Developmental Disabilities

Susy Woods, Illinois Assistive Technology Program

There are currently six (4) vacant seats for appointment for Division of Early Childhood, Department of Human Services, veterans with disabilities, and organized labor.

*Co-chairs

II. BACKGROUND

The Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities (EEOPD) Taskforce was established in 2009 via Legislation (PA 96-368). The EEOPD Taskforce purpose is to

“...analyze programs and policies of the state to determine what changes, modifications, and innovations may be necessary to remove barriers to competitive employment and economic opportunity for persons with disabilities. The Taskforce makes recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor including regulatory changes to advance employment and economic opportunities for persons with disabilities in Illinois.”

The State of Illinois legislature passed legislation in 2013 declaring Illinois an [Employment First](#) State via the Employment First Act ([20 ILCS 40](#)) with the objective to ensure people with disabilities are given the option to engage in integrated, competitive employment at or above minimum wage. Executive order [14-08](#), signed in 2014, set forth a process for Illinois to achieve this goal.

The Taskforce created four workgroups to support the Employment First initiative: Workforce Development, Provider, Employer, and Transition. In 2018, the Taskforce created a [Recommendations Report](#), detailing implementation strategies for the state of Illinois in each of the Workgroup focus areas, which continues to guide the work and priorities of the Taskforce today. In response to the recommendations, the Taskforce added a Legislative Workgroup and in 2024 a Dignity in Pay subgroup to the Legislative Workgroup.

The Taskforce encompasses sixteen designated State Agencies: Governor’s Office, Education: (Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO), and Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Health and Human Services, Divisions of: Rehabilitation Services (DRS), Developmental Disabilities (DDD), and Mental Health (DMH), Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities (ICDD), Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), and Veterans Affairs. In addition, fifteen public members (at least 5 who are disabled) have seats for appointment on the Taskforce. The diverse stakeholder group is comprised of representatives from the following sectors:

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

III. WORKGROUP SUMMARIES

A. Workforce Development Workgroup

The Workforce Development Workgroup was formed to identify key policies, practices, and strategies to align services and to improve opportunities for competitive and integrated employment. The Workforce Development Workgroup’s strategic focus areas include:

- 1) Aligning the State’s mandated requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) with Employment First principles. Alignment will result in opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for youth and adults with disabilities to include people currently receiving sub-minimum wage.
- 2) Transforming the State into a model employer for people with disabilities. The State becoming a model employer will ensure people with significant disabilities can receive reasonable accommodations, including exemptions from the current testing and interview process for state employees.
- 3) Modifying the State’s Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and the State-Use Program to be consistent with Employment First. Modifications will require statutory and regulatory changes.
- 4) Ensuring the State’s website structure and content on www.illinois.gov follows federal and state accessibility laws. Ensuring accessibility will require a centralized and coordinated audit of current content and policies and procedures for posting content moving forward.
- 5) Establishing a Statewide training protocol on Employment First for new and existing employees. Using already existing materials and coordinating with ongoing training events will facilitate the process.

The Workforce Development Work Group identified the state agencies and departments who will play a central role in achieving objectives their strategic focus areas. Notably, Central Management Services (CMS) will play a key role given its responsibility for hiring policies, website management, and training. Additionally, CMS oversees the two major programs who must change to comply with Employment First – the BEP and the State Use Program. Other agencies who will play key roles will be the Illinois Department of Human Services-Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, especially with respect to their work on the implementation of WIOA, and the Department of Innovation & Technology (DoIT) regarding the accessibility of state websites and technology systems.

Chair: Barry Taylor, Equip for Equality (Retired December 2023)
Darius McKinney IDHS-Division of Mental Health

B. Provider Workgroup

The Provider Workgroup was formed to identify key policies, practices and strategies must be addressed and embraced for all citizens of Illinois to achieve the goal of employment. The Provider Workgroup’s strategic focus areas include:

- 1) Aligning State policies, practices, and funding mechanisms with the ideal all citizens are capable of competitive employment, and employment should be the first consideration for adults of working age.
- 2) Redesigning the State’s current service delivery system for existing services to be re-aligned toward supporting the goal of competitive and integrated employment.
- 3) Addressing Statewide systemic barriers currently impeding the pursuit of competitive integrated employment and crafted concrete steps for remedying these obstacles.
- 4) Assuring State agency resources are expended on daytime supports are focused on preparing people to pursue and achieve competitive employment and supporting people to become full and productive members of their communities.

The Provider Workgroup identified multiple state agencies and departments who will play a central role in achieving objectives their strategic focus areas. Divisions within the Department of Human Services, specifically the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Mental Health, and the Division of Developmental Disabilities are the most critical entities to pursuing and accomplishing the steps outlined in our recommendations, though other state departments are referenced as well. The Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities plays a critical role in supporting the evolution toward a more employment-focused system.

Co-Chairs: Kathy Carmody, The Institute on Public Policy for People with Disabilities
 Casey Burke, IDHS – Division of Developmental Disabilities

C. Employer Workgroup

The Employer Workgroup was formed to provide recommendations that will sustain the increased engagement of public and private employers to achieve Employment First in Illinois. The Employer Workgroup's strategic focus areas include:

- 1) Developing a State supported awareness campaign to educate employers, both private and public, regarding the benefits, incentives and value proposition of hiring, training, retaining and advancement of persons with disabilities,
- 2) Creating a Statewide, State supported shared service portal for employers and vocational providers (including but not limited to community rehabilitation programs),
- 3) Implementing a Statewide, State supported functional system to connect employers with vocational providers, and
- 4) Developing and executing a Statewide, State supported meaningful and validated measurement process.

The Employer Workgroup identified multiple state agencies and departments who will play a central role in achieving objectives their strategic focus areas. Particularly, Governor's Office, Central Management Services, Department of Employment Security, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Department of Information Technology, Department of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Services. Additionally, all the agencies identified or required to be involved in the Employment First Act, and any agency who does not rely solely on general revenue funds.

Co-Chairs: Maria Doughty, The Chicago Network
 Anna D'Ascenzo, Illinois Department of Employment Security

D. Transition Workgroup

The Transition Workgroup was formed to identify policies and practices that will increase the competitive and integrated employment of youth. The Transition Workgroup's strategic areas of focus include:

- 1) Ensure the State enacts high quality transition planning and service coordination personnel at the local and regional levels and using Transition Planning Committees (TPC) effectively. Transition plans and services must be prepared for all students with disabilities in Illinois must provide consistent, high-quality, individualized services to prepare them for employment and other facets of adult life.
- 2) Improving the State's collection, analysis, and reporting of post-transition outcome data for students. The task to design a process for collecting, analyzing, coordinating, and sharing data regarding transitions is assigned to this Taskforce.
- 3) Consider the unique needs of the State's at-risk students with disabilities, (e.g., those coming out of youth corrections systems and diversion programs, Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) custody, and students with significant mental health needs, social and emotional learning deficits, and behavioral issues) and specifically target at-risk youth for appropriate and timely interventions and service coordination.
- 4) Ensure the person-centered planning (PCP) process starts early in the transition process and continues as required under the HCBS waiver rules into adult services and employment Statewide. Students with significant disabilities who will likely qualify for Home & Community-Based Services (HCBS) Medicaid waiver services should have PCP incorporated into the transition planning process.
- 5) Provide Statewide meaningful access to post-secondary education for students with disabilities. Meaningful access requires, among other things, effective communication with high schools, parents, and students to ensure full understanding of the eligibility and verification requirements for accommodations and modifications under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA, and information about services available at post-secondary institution.

The Transition Workgroup identified multiple state agencies and departments who will play a central role in achieving objectives their strategic focus areas. Primarily, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) must be leaders in this endeavor and include the State agencies and departments whose participation is critical to this process. The workgroup also identified some key non-State participants such as local school districts, special education joint agreements, Transition Planning Committees (TPC), the Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP) (due to the well-established and growing importance of AT in preparing students with disabilities for adult life, including post-secondary education, vocational training and employment), centers for independent living, adult service providers, and others.

Co-Chairs: LaMetric Lane, Illinois State Board of Education
Mariel Hamer-Sinclair, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities

E. Legislative Workgroup

The Legislative Workgroup was formed after publishing 2017 EEOPD recommendations report to consider legislation and policy, advise the Taskforce on legislative and policy ideas, and review relevant pending legislation. The Legislative Workgroup will solidify its strategic focus areas in 2024, to include at least:

- 1) Monitor legislation relevant to the work of the Taskforce, and
- 2) Keep members apprised of updates to proposed/pending legislation.

Legislative Workgroup Dignity in Pay Subgroup

The Dignity in Pay Subgroup was formed to create a multi-year plan of recommended actions, outcomes, and benchmarks in accordance with paragraphs to help the State successfully eliminate the use of 14(c) certificates on July 1, 2029. The Dignity in Pay Subgroup's focus areas include:

- 1) Identification, gathering, and analytics of State data to inform the work.
- 2) Consider people in Illinois earning subminimum wage who want to transition to competitive employment, people who do not wish to transition to competitive employment, existing State employment programs, capacity limits of providers, personal choice, use of emerging technologies, and access to reliable transportation.
- 3) Potential changes to State law and regulations
- 4) Dissemination of relevant information and education and training needs Statewide.

The Legislative Workgroup will identify the state agencies and departments who will play a central role in achieving objectives their strategic focus areas. Partners will include at least employment service providers, people with disabilities, disability trade associations, and disability advocacy organizations.

Co-Chairs: Phil Milsk, Attorney and Public Policy Advocate
 Mariel Hamer-Sinclair, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities

IV. KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND UPDATES

In 2024 the EEOPD Taskforce experienced a restructure and the Taskforce’s State Administrators transferred from the Illinois Department of Human Services Secretary’s Office of to the Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services Director’s Office. Due to administrative restructuring within the Department of Human Services and the EEOPD Taskforce, the EEOPD Taskforce was on hiatus during a portion of this reporting period from March 2023 – November 2023. After redesignation, the EEOPD Taskforce reconvened in December 2023 and held the group’s first official meeting on, January 10, 2024. The meeting was held remotely using videoconferencing. The Taskforce followed-up in-person for an informal working day on February 28, 2024, to review the 2022-2023 Annual report and outline workgroup activities for the remainder of the reporting year.

Administrators within the Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services, along with the Employment First Administrator and EEOPD Taskforce Chairpersons outlined the following priorities:

- 1) Work to fully staff membership vacancies within the EEOPD Taskforce. The focus has been to bring aboard subject matter experts and those with lived experience.
- 2) Meet with representatives of the Governor’s Office to ensure the EEOPD taskforce has appropriate resources to move recommendations forward and support the work of the workgroups within the EEOPD Taskforce at large.
- 3) Establish a Self-Employment Subcommittee to launch Entrepreneurial opportunities for people with disabilities.

A. Workforce Development Reporting Period Activities

Despite the hiatus of the full Taskforce, a small group of individuals from the Workforce Development Workgroup, the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT), and other agency representatives continued to meet quarterly to work on technology and accessibility issues.

The Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology

- 1) Established an Office of Information Accessibility and Chief Information Accessibility Officer (CIAO). Mike Scott, who has a long history of championing information accessibility in Illinois, started as Illinois’ inaugural CIAO on June 1, 2022.
- 2) Met quarterly with the Illinois Governor’s Office and representatives of disability advocacy groups to
 - a. Report their progress and discuss priorities for ensuring that information technology in the state of Illinois is accessible to residents and staff with disabilities.
 - b. Championed systems change in accessibility for persons with disabilities,
 - Monitored progress on State website modernization including the migration of data from SharePoint to the new Automated *Adobe* Experience Manager (AEM)
 - Created DoIT monthly website accessibility reports.

- All 100+ State websites that were hosted in SharePoint have been migrated to Adobe Experience Manager (AEM). An automated accessibility monitoring system was implemented as part of the process, and accessibility scores were improved by an average of 7.4 points during the migration.
- Monitored progress on the accessibility of the State’s SAP recruiting tool. Accessibility testing was incorporated as an integral part of the SAP implementation process.
- Independently verify accessibility improvements across all SAP modules.
- Guaranteed improvements to the accessibility of Webex, including its new polling tool.
- Office of Information Accessibility meets weekly with Cisco to verify accessibility improvements in the Webex app.
- Examined improvements to the accessibility of the IDES application system. All critical accessibility issues were addressed in the IDES IBIS unemployment benefits application system.
- Successfully advocated for accessibility to become a requirement in the process for reviewing technology projects and procurements.
- Added an accessibility approval as a required step in the State’s Information Technology Governance process; the Office of Information Accessibility meets with the Governance team twice a week to review projects and proposals.

Simultaneously the Workforce Development Workgroup:

- 1) Ensured accessibility and disability inclusion was included in the broader diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts by the Chief Equity Officer in the Governor’s Office:
 - a. Continued working with Governor’s office to ensure disability and accessibility were included in their Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) priorities.
 - b. Continued collaboration with the State’s Interagency Committee for Employees with Disabilities (I.C.E.D) to work on
 - The percentage of State employees with disabilities,
 - Increase the number of State employees with disabilities, and
 - Disability Preference.
 - c. Collaborate statewide efforts for expungement of criminal records, which is often a barrier to employment.
 - d. Collaborate with other state disability-focused groups to be guest presenters for the taskforce meetings.

B. Provider Workgroup Reporting Period Activities

The Provider Workgroup reports being inactive during the hiatus from May 1, 2023 – January 10, 2024. The workgroup reconstituted during the period of inactivity and has reconvened since the EEOPD Taskforce Meeting in January 2024. The workgroup has scheduled to host their first meeting on April 24, 2024.

C. Employer Subgroup Reporting Period Activities:

The Employer Workgroup was inactive during the hiatus from the period of May 1, 2023 – January 10, 2024. Since the Taskforce meeting in January 2024, the workgroup is reportedly working to recruit private employers to the workgroup as well as providers who have transitioned out of 14c Subminimum Wage certificates.

D. Transition Workgroup Reporting Period Activities:

The Transition Workgroup continued to meet during this reporting period from May 1, 2023 – May 1, 2024. During the reporting period the Transition Workgroup and its state agency subgroup

- 1) Engaged in bi-monthly meetings with a primary focus on data management and aligning with the 2018 Employment and Economic Opportunities for People with Disabilities (EEOPD) recommendations.
- 2) Highlighted the necessity for a formalized database.
- 3) The Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services, and Juvenile Justice agencies presented their respective transition-related data during meetings in 2023.
- 4) Committed to addressing data concerns throughout 2024.

E. Legislative Workgroup Reporting Period Activities:

Although the Legislative Workgroup was largely inactive during the hiatus from May 1, 2023 – January 2024, however they still

- 1) Accepted legislative referrals on behalf of the EEOPD Taskforce
- 2) Worked with the Governor’s Office and Legislators to remove barriers and support employment for people with disabilities.
- 3) Proactively created a Dignity in Pay subgroup in anticipation of passing the proposed legislation.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with reporting requirements outlined in PA96-368, the EEOPD taskforce offers the following recommendations to the State:

A. Legislative Proposals

The Task Force provides no new Legislative recommendations at this time.

B. Regulatory Changes

- 1) Identify regulatory changes necessary for compliance with HB 2878 which affected Section 45-35 of the Procurement Code section governing the State Use Program to align the Code with Executive Order 2021-26 by
 - a. requiring State Use Program employers to pay their employees at least the applicable Illinois or local minimum wage, and
 - b. eliminating the requirement for employers to obtain 14(c) certification from the U.S. Department of Labor.
- 2) Follow House Bill 5354 The Customize Employment for Persons with Disabilities Act Program. to ensure measures are in place for positive statewide impact to include:
 - a. access to customized employment by changing the current 5-year window. ICDD is working with a consultant on proposed contract language to accomplish this objective.
- 3) Follow House Bill 793 Dignity in Pay designed to eliminate subminimum wages for persons with disabilities and to eliminate 14c certificates, to ensure measures are in place for positive statewide impact.
- 4) Begin proactive, preliminary work to address the following elements outlined in Dignity in Pay

a. Plan of Action

The Plan of Action will cover multiple years and consist of recommended actions, anticipated outcomes, benchmarks, and funding recommendations. The Dignity in Pay working group will consider issues affecting the individual and their support system, the 14c certificate holder, and the broader employment landscape, to include employer impacts. Focal points of the plan will include measurable goals and objectives for the State to ensure:

- Competitive and integrated employment is the first option when servicing persons with disabilities of working age as set forth in the Illinois Employment First Act,
- Persons with disabilities have the opportunity to pursue employment paid at amount equal to or higher than minimum wage,

- Service enhancements, rate adjustments, investments, and policy changes necessary to address systemic barriers,
- Collaborative partnerships between State agencies and key stakeholder organizations,
- Elimination of Section 14(c) certificates, and
- Funding is available to support the legislation (i.e., Transition Grant Fund).

b. Data Collection

Data collection plan will allow the Taskforce to monitor the measured progress toward the implementation of Dignity in Pay. Focal points of the plan will include:

- Identification of necessary data points to measure progress,
- Identification of State agencies required to collect necessary data points,
- Data sharing methodologies, understanding and considering the differences in IT capabilities between State agencies, and an
- Evaluation plan.

c. Sustainability

The Taskforce will consider barriers facing individuals with disabilities in the workforce, while also supporting social and economic justice and protecting civil rights. The work group will consider issues surrounding long-term systemic changes necessary to ensure personal growth and economic opportunities for persons with disabilities in Illinois.

C. Systems Changes

- 1) Evaluate whether publicly available resources to support attainment and retainment of CIE are adequate.
- 2) Committee recommends the state be required to develop strategies to minimize the impact/loss of employment for people with significant disabilities/support needs.
- 3) Consider options for transforming Community Day Services (CDS) programs to incubator hubs for entrepreneurial/employment opportunities.
- 4) Create a working group to support efforts and actions required to pass and implement Dignity in Pay legislation designed to eliminate subminimum wage practices in Illinois.
- 5) Identify private employers who seek to join the Taskforce or
- 6) Work collaboratively with private employers on inclusion and diversifying the private workplace.
- 7) Governor's Office to appoint private employers to the EEOPD Taskforce.

- 8) Address systemic barriers which hinder students with disabilities from achieving their post-secondary employment outcomes.
- 9) Aim to foster meaningful post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities.
- 10) Implement WIOA Unified State Plan by way of Workforce Partner group engagement (DCEO, DRS, ICCB, and IDES).
- 11) Division of Rehabilitation should change self-employment rule to increase self-employment initiatives for people with disabilities.

D. Budget Initiatives

- 1) Financial support to develop and maintain a database to compile and analyze data to support the work of the EEOPD Taskforce, statewide agencies, and other non-for-profit organization.
- 2) Appropriate funds to support Dignity in Pay legislation Respond to DRS Guide house rate recommendations.
- 3) Evaluate Impact of additional referrals to DRS due to elimination of 14c
- 4) Financial support to encourage self-employment and economic growth opportunities for people with disabilities.

-----END OF REPORT-----