

Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council
Employment Position Paper

General/Philosophy/Values

People with disabilities should have the same expectations as those without disabilities to pursue and secure employment that is fulfilling to them. Society benefits when people are employed and when the workforce is diverse. Employers' attitudes have to change to recognize the value of including people with disabilities in the workforce.

Particular attention should be paid to those with disabilities who are members of marginalized groups, because they face discrimination on multiple fronts. All services and supports must be provided in a culturally competent manner with specific attention to the needs of minority communities.

People with disabilities have the right to equal access to productive employment in a job they have chosen with wages and benefits on a par with people without disabilities. They have the right to opportunities for growth and advancement. Workers with disabilities must have access to the supports and accommodations they need to be successful and must not be threatened with loss of benefits or other rights because of their disability.

People with disabilities should have the opportunity to work with their non-disabled peers. The Council does not view segregated and sheltered programs as employment. Technical assistance on becoming providers of employment supports within the community should be offered to providers of facility-based vocational services, adult training facilities and others. Opportunities for integrated employment and job training should not be inhibited by the perceived need to maintain programs that provide non-vocational supports.

Recognizing the value of the work of and employment for people with disabilities, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf signed Executive Order 2016-03 – Establishing “Employment First” Policy and Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Pennsylvanians with a Disability on March 10, 2016. The Executive Order and the Recommendations published in September, 2016 move Pennsylvania towards an inclusive employment model.

Principles for Success

- ***Attitudes and Information:*** Resources must be focused on providing information and changing attitudes of employers, co-workers, family members and people with disabilities themselves. People with disabilities and family members need to be aware of all the options available to them so that they can make informed choices. It is particularly important to reach parents of young children, so that they are aware of the full range of educational options available. Employers and employees must be made aware of the incentives and supports available to them such as tax credits, Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS), Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities, etc. Providers and residential staff must be flexible enough to support employment choices by accommodating individuals’ varying shifts, transportation needs, etc.
- ***Career Options:*** People should have the opportunity to explore a variety of job options with opportunities for growth and advancement. This should include options such as: competitive employment (including customized employment), supported employment, post-secondary education, apprenticeships, paid internships, small business, and part-time work and self-employment opportunities. In some cases, volunteer opportunities should be considered as a path to employment. Flexibility should be

maximized, ensuring the availability of job redefinition and redesign, career building and career ladders, telecommuting, flexible work time, etc. Accommodations should be made prior to the start of employment as needed.

- ***Person Directed Support Services:*** Workers must have access to supports including but not limited to: accommodations in the work place; assistive technology; accessible public transportation; hiring a support person, such as a job coach or an attendant. Public funding should be adequate to provide needed supports. Supports provided should be chosen and directed by the worker, based on individual need and preference. Supports may be provided at the work site, in transportation to or from the work site, or in the employee's home. The disability services system must be designed and funded to support people's vocational choices.
- ***Lifespan:*** Career exploration and planning must begin at an early age and be available throughout the person's life, through school-to-work transition and work-to-retirement. In addition, people must be supported through voluntary job or career changes or layoffs. Lifelong educational opportunities, including access to postsecondary education, should be promoted.
- ***Interagency Collaboration:*** At the state and local level, agencies must work together to provide employment, employment services and supports. This includes both agencies that specialize in serving those with disabilities and generic employment agencies. Programs designed to move people from welfare to work should interface with programs serving people with disabilities. This requires cooperation between government and private agencies and among government agencies, including benefit issuing agencies, educational agencies, transportation agencies, etc.

Agreements must be reached about areas of authority and payment responsibility.

- ***Commonwealth Responsibility:*** The Governor's Executive Order and the recommendations which followed are a good start. It is now imperative that the recommendations be translated into concrete action steps with time frames. The state Civil Service Commission (CSC) needs to reform hiring processes, reference section 511 of Title V: Rehabilitation Act. The CSC and other state agencies must do more to hire people with disabilities and to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and with the Governor's executive order. Pennsylvania should adopt the federal 7% Rule which requires federal contractors and subcontractors to attain, or show progress toward attaining, a workforce that consists of at least seven percent of people with disabilities. The Department of General Services should aggressively recruit additional disability-owned small businesses in Pennsylvania to participate in the newly expanded Diversity, Inclusion, and Small Business Opportunities (DISBO) program. A paid internship initiative would increase access to paid work experiences. The Department of Labor and Industry Office of Vocational Rehabilitation must offer integrated pre-employment transition services.

In Conclusion

The Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council strongly believes that employment expectations and opportunities for people with disabilities are rooted in honoring individual rights, broad and informed systems change, and education and advocacy for the advancement of diverse, culturally competent and inclusive workplaces. The philosophies and actions described above are facets of advancing an individual's opportunity to have choice and control over his or her life, career, and resources.

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