

# **Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

## **Commission Meeting**

### **Meeting Minutes**

Date of meeting: Wednesday, October 20, 2021

Start time: 10:00am

End time: 11:30am

Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

<b>Members Participating Remotely</b>	
<b>1</b>	Gyasi Burks-Abbott - LEND Program, Boston Children's Hospital/Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston
<b>2</b>	Representative Gerard Cassidy - House of Representatives
<b>3</b>	Representative Denise Garlick - House of Representatives
<b>4</b>	Nancy Garr-Colzie - Member, Worcester Disability Commission; Board Chair, Center for Living & Working
<b>5</b>	Representative Kay Khan - House of Representatives
<b>6</b>	Andrew Levrault - Disabled Persons Protection Commission
<b>7</b>	Ann Lynch - Massachusetts Attorney General's Office
<b>8</b>	Oswald Mondejar - Spaulding Rehabilitation Network (MGB)
<b>9</b>	Representative Mathew Muratore - House of Representatives
<b>10</b>	Bridget Murphy - Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin
<b>11</b>	Angela Ortiz - Massachusetts Pediatric Home Nursing Campaign
<b>12</b>	Kathy Petkauskos - University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School
<b>13</b>	Nancy Rumbolt-Trzcinski - Massachusetts Statewide Independent Living Council
<b>14</b>	Dan Shannon - MA Developmental Disabilities Council
<b>15</b>	Paul Spooner - Metrowest Center for Independent Living
<b>16</b>	Kerry Thompson - Silent Rhythms Inc. / Disability Rights Fund
<b>17</b>	Christopher White - Road To Responsibility, Inc. (RTR)
<b>18</b>	Liz Zelnick - Office of the Massachusetts State Treasurer
<b>Members Not Present</b>	
	Charles Carr - Disability Policy Consortium
	Felix Martinez
	Senator Patrick O'Connor - Massachusetts Senate

### **Proceedings**

#### **I. Welcome, Roll Call, and Approval of 9/22/21 Meeting Minutes - 10:00am**

- Representative Garlick welcomed Commission members to the second meeting of the Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Rep. Garlick explained the accessibility: ASL interpreters were on the Zoom call, CART services were available, and the meeting was being livestreamed on [malegislature.gov](http://malegislature.gov) for public viewing.
- Roll call was called with 18 members present (see table on page 1).

- c. Chris White motioned to accept the meeting minutes; Liz Zelnick seconded the motion. The Commission unanimously approved the minutes among those present.

## **II. Continue Discussion of Values Statements – 10:08am**

- a. Chair Garlick opened the floor to continue discussions of the values statements from the previous meeting. She asked that commissioners who emailed her suggestions present them to the entire Commission to ensure open deliberation.
- b. Commissioners supported adding statements on inclusion and language supporting access to integrated and adaptive physical activity, sport, recreation and entertainment, in addition to work opportunities.
- c. Commissioners supported adding in the 4<sup>th</sup> bullet that people with disabilities have value to add to workforce but are often undervalued and experience social and economic disadvantage. Commissioners pointed to health equity, diversion, and inclusiveness as reasons to support this statement.
- d. There was debate on the suggestion to strike the 5<sup>th</sup> bullet and insert language that “Massachusetts shall adopt and promote a value proposition for public and private employers of all sizes and industries to include individuals with disabilities in their organizations as employees, customers, and suppliers.” This led to discussion of companies’ diversity statements and whether disabilities should be included in those statements. Commissioners voiced support for this and would share language their own organizations use to promote disability inclusion in diversity statements. Overall, there was strong support for highlighting disability in diversity and inclusion.
- e. There was support for adding language to design the workforce to help people with disabilities to locate, be recruited and retain jobs – opportunities to be engaged
- f. Commissioners expressed support for keeping the statements broad.
- g. There was general support to amend language in the 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet to focus on the individuals themselves being engaged in policy making, specifically the phrase “alongside families, advocates and champions from agencies, education, business and communities” without having a qualifier. However, several commissioners expressed reluctance to completely strike the phrase because families and allies are so important.
- h. Collin Fedor (Rep. Garlick staff) laid out the timeline for submitting the annual report, including the values statements, by the statutory deadline:
  - i. **Friday, October 22 at 5:00pm:** Deadline to submit written comments on the values statements and draft annual report.
  - ii. **Wednesday, October 27 at 10:00am:** Executive board will share final draft of values statements and annual report.
  - iii. **Friday, October 29 at 10:00am:** Virtual meeting to finalize values statements and annual report.

## **III. Lessons Learned during COVID – 10:55am**

- a. Rep. Garlick asked commissioners to share in 2-3 minutes what they have learned for disability population during COVID, focusing on strengths and things that need to be strengthened.
- b. One commissioner share that they felt multiple levels of effects. They had to close the office, which required a substantial change in management philosophy. As a person with a disability, they were set up with tools to work from home, but the personal cost (e.g.

oxygen delivery) was stressful, and there was an impact from putting off medical checkups. They described that people with disabilities have always been able to work remotely and the pandemic helped showcase that people are capable of working from different locations.

- c. One commissioner described the opportunities and barriers of COVID. For the deaf and hard of hearing community, access to information has been a challenge - can no longer read lips with masks on, need to decide whether comfortable touching someone to communicate or not communicate at all. Meetings conducted virtually are not always accessible. The biggest struggle for communication has been information on health care – updates do not provide option for sign language, interpreters are often unavailable for telehealth appointments, and hospitals do not have a website dedicated to accessibility. The commissioner shared a link to the COVID card the Commission of Deaf and Hard of Hearing created for people to point to facilitate communication:  
<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/mcdhh-visor-card>.
- d. One commissioner described their experience as an agency in the Berkshires. They have had to handle all phone calls coming into the agency because people have really needed to talk due to isolation. Further, as a person who is blind, their service dog cannot not determine 6 feet apart for social distancing.
- e. One commissioner shared that people were more resilient and able to better adjust than the staff providing the support. Telehealth works for more people than expected, but people with most complex needs were more and more left behind and families experienced greater responsibilities day to day than when in person was available. They also stated it is easier to close services than reopen services and it has become more difficult to get people with disabilities jobs that fit their life goals as it seems employers have moved away from strategies that help people with disabilities acquire employment.
- f. One commissioner described that the nurses delivering skilled care needed to leave workforce, exacerbating existing problems. They described safety and needing to advocate when the crisis standards of care came out. They described that children with disabilities lost services because they were not in school, which placed a greater stress on parents to deliver these services themselves.
- g. One commissioner described how COVID highlighted problems that already existed. They pointed to the ability of people to work remotely and described his hope that the flexibility afforded by remote meetings, including municipal meetings, remains.
- h. One commissioner reflected on the previous comments and described his observations in healthcare, where he saw adaptability and resiliency, such as masks with screens to allow lip reading. They described the need to continue to be more resourceful on how we consider accessibility.

#### **IV. Annual Report - 11:25am**

- a. A draft of the annual report was sent to commissioners and the public before the meeting. Rep. Garlick described the report's structure and asked Commissioners to review the report and follow the timeline described by Collin Fedor at the end of II. Discussion of Values Statements.

#### **V. Adjournment - 11:30am**

- a. Rep. Muratore motioned to adjourn, Oz Mondejar seconded. Motion was unanimously approved and meeting adjourned at 11:30am.