

**Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities  
Disability Employment Subcommittee  
Meeting Minutes**

Date of meeting: Monday, February 24, 2025

Start time: 12:00pm

Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

Members Participating Remotely	
1	Rachel Stanton – Investor Relations and Communications Graphic Designer, Clean Water Trust (Co-Chair)
2	Gyasi Burks-Abbott – Self Advocate Faculty, LEND Fellowship, Boston Children's Hospital (Co-Chair)
3	Kathy Petkauskos (Chair) – Director, Work Without Limits at UMass Chan Medical School
4	Chris White – CEO, Road to Responsibility, Inc.
5	Lexi Semanchik – HR Marking and Communications Specialist Walks of Life: Intergenerational Employee Resource Group Chair
6	Carl Richardson – ADA Coordinator, Massachusetts State House
Members Not Present	
7	Oz Mondejar – President, Mucho Gusto Consulting

Action Items		Person Responsible
1	Collaborate with Workforce Supports members on Employment and Providers supports panel	Co-Chairs, Imene
2	Organize a discussion forum with the three organizations featured in the video, targeting small to mid-sized businesses.	Ongoing, on hold due to other project with Workforce Supports subcommittee.
3	Invite Commonwealth Corp to present on their <a href="#">latest ARPA and Workforce Development Initiatives</a>	Imene
4	Reach out to the Executive Board regarding next steps regarding MassAbility partnership regarding benefit cliff issue.	Imene
5	Develop mini internal newsletter to summarize subcommittee work, with potential for future public distribution	Rachel and Imene

## Agenda

1. Welcome, Roll Call, and Meeting Minutes Approval

- Minutes approval moved to next meeting
2. Benefits Cliff Update from the MA Executive Office of Labor, MassAbility, and Commonwealth Corp: Developments, Challenges, and Next Steps

### **Department of Economic Research (DER): Benefit Cliff and Workforce Reentry**

- DER is analyzing the impact of the benefit cliff for individuals re-entering the labor market, with a primary focus on SSDI.
- Findings indicate that many SSDI recipients will experience a significant income threshold if they return to their previous occupation.
- Will provide a detailed report soon.

### **Discussion and Key Points**

- Commissioner Wolf noted that similar work has been done and suggested maximizing collaboration by incorporating DER's findings into ongoing efforts. DER confirmed that they had spoken with Accenture.
- MassAbility met with SSDI Commissioner O'Malley before his resignation to explore legislative and congressional support for expanding available resources. Additionally, they partnered with Brandeis University on research regarding SSDI/SSI challenges, but national grant funding has been cut.
- Gyasi addressed the misconception that most Medicaid recipients do not work, noting that Medicaid plays a crucial role in helping individuals return to employment. He inquired about the extent of MassHealth funding for employment support, to which MassAbility confirmed they receive no direct funding.
- Joe Reale from MassAbility highlighted that a significant portion of their benefit counselors' time, approximately 40% of an FTE, is spent assisting individuals in navigating MassHealth benefits.
- Kathy shared a relevant link: [Social Security Administration](#).
- The issue of benefit cliffs is also affecting food stamps and Social Security benefits.
- Tovah Sweeney Miller from the Executive office of Labor noted that progress on addressing these challenges has been slower than anticipated. Conversations are ongoing with EOTTS and ANF on technical questions, including data governance and leveraging historical data from Learn to Earn. There may be an upcoming opportunity to consolidate and analyze additional data from ANF.

### **Strategizing Next Steps**

- MassAbility emphasized the importance of developing a strategic approach to addressing these issues.
- Commissioner Wolf expressed openness to further discussions with legislators and suggested MassAbility could play a role in educating and informing policymakers about the benefit cliff and related challenges.

- MassAbility inquired about what has been heard from state legislators, with the general consensus that many are still uncertain on how to respond.
- Kathy pointed out that funding for benefit counseling services for SSI and SSDI recipients is limited, with demand far exceeding available resources. If these services diminish further, the state will face significant challenges in supporting people with disabilities.
- Kathy also shared updates on federal Social Security offices:
  - Field offices now require appointments and are no longer accommodating walk-ins.
  - All federal employees are now required to work in-office, but there have been no reported layoffs or terminations within the Social Security Administration.

### **ARPA and Workforce Development Initiatives**

- ARPA funds have been allocated to support employment initiatives for young adults with disabilities. More information: [Healey-Driscoll Administration Awards \\$850,000 for Employment Programs](#).

#### **3. Discussion on potential event with Workforce Supports subcommittee**

- Possible panel discussion for young people seeking employment and personal care attendants (PCAs) and job coaches supporting them.
- Consider including legislators in the panel to elevate the conversation.
- Engaging with the Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities, Committee on Labor and Workforce Development.
- ADDP's job coach program, led by Don Hughes of Riverside Community Care, launched the first regional supported employment group.
- The role of job coaches and the PCA Council was highlighted as critical to workforce support.
- Recruitment and retention efforts for PCAs remain a key focus, along with informing individuals about career opportunities and pathways into the field.
- Gyasi emphasized that this is a pivotal moment to showcase the essential work PCAs do.

#### **4. Inspirational Quote by Walt Whitman provided by Rachel Stanton:**

*“Keep your face always toward the sunshine – and shadows will fall behind you.”*

### **Action Items**

- Imene will reach out to the Executive Board regarding next steps.
- MassAbility will explore ways to provide legislators with data and insights on the benefit cliff issue.

- Continue discussions on workforce initiatives and benefit counseling availability

## 5. Adjournment