



MASSACHUSETTS PERMANENT COMMISSION ON
THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

FY23 ANNUAL REPORT

OCTOBER 18, 2023

MASSACHUSETTS



COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Membership would like to thank individuals with disabilities, service providers, other state agencies, family members and caretakers, advocates, and local disability commissions for their collaboration and partnership.

THIS REPORT IS DEDICATED TO:

Paul W. Spooner

April 17, 1955 - October 8, 2022

***"The work goes on the cause endures, the
hope still lives and the dreams shall never die"***

- SENATOR TED KENNEDY

CHARGE

The commission is required to annually "report the results of its findings and activities of the preceding fiscal year and its recommendations, which may include draft legislation, to the governor, the house and senate committees on ways and means, the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate, the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities and the joint committee on labor and workforce development." As such, this report will summarize the activities of the Commission from July 2022 through June 2023.





Artwork by: Barbara Brown, Gateway Arts. Mixed Media, 10.75 inches x 8.25 inches.
Description: Mixed Media painting of the sunrise/sunset reflecting over a body of water.

SPECIAL THANK YOU TO:

GATEWAY ARTS

All artwork featured in this report has been donated from the talented artists at Gateway Arts.

KRISTEN HOURIHAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography for the National Disability Employment Awareness Month event by Kristen Hourihan.



Artwork by: Carmella Salvucci, Gateway Arts. Acrylic, 10.75 inches x 8.25 inches.
Description: Acrylic painting of the sun reflecting its rays over the ocean.

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Photos by: Kristen Hourihan. Description: A person is sitting in a chair with a yellow lab at their feet looking up at them.

SECTION I: FY23 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Established by the Legislature in 2020, the Commission has a broad charge to advance the cause of all persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth. The Commission members are actively engaged in work rooted in shared values and in collaboration with individuals with disabilities, service providers, other state agencies, family members and caretakers, advocates, employers, businesses, local disability commissions, and more.

Issue

Employment has been determined to be a critical social determinant of health, as employment can provide a source of income, health insurance coverage, social connections or sense of purpose. Yet, the current unemployment rate for persons with a disability in MA is **13%**, more than triple than their non-disabled counterparts at **3.5%**. Similarly, the workforce supports shortage continues to be in crisis for providers who provide direct services for persons with disabilities. The Commission has been holding listening sessions with diverse key players in working on finding solutions to these critical issues.

Focus

The Commission's main goals this year have been to **(1)** promote disability employment as an answer to the workforce crisis to improve Massachusetts' competitiveness across industries and **(2)** the workforce serving individuals with disabilities that is in crisis. Three of the Commission's subcommittees are leading the charge: disability employment, workforce supports, and legislative and budget and continue their work in educating members on barriers to employment, gathering data from diverse sources, identifying common threads, and seeing what short- and long-term strategies have been proposed to Massachusetts agencies, piloted, or implemented in other states.

Conclusion

The Commission is consistently moving forward to advance the cause of all persons with disabilities. We continue to address workforce issues, including disability employment and the workforce who serves individuals with disabilities, as we shore up the foundations of our work for the future.



Artwork by: Donna Esolen, Gateway Arts. Colored Pencil, 10.75 inches x 8.25 inches.

Description: Colored pencil painting of trees with red leaves in a lush, green forest.

SECTION II. INTRODUCTION

The [Massachusetts Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities](#) is a 23-member, independent state agency with a broad charge to advance the cause of all persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth. Comprised of volunteer commissioners from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and socio-economic backgrounds, members draw from personal and professional experience to passionately promote the charge and serve all individuals with disabilities in Massachusetts.

The scope of the Commission's work includes examining ways to:

- improve employment and transportation
- assess data and disparities
- encourage inclusion of persons with disabilities as employees and vendors within the private and public sector workforce
- assess programs and practices in all state agencies as they affect persons with disabilities
- advise the legislative and executive branches
- promote and facilitate collaboration among local disability commissions, disability rights advocacy organizations and disability employment service providers.



Photos by: Kristen Hourihan. Description: A photograph of the Great Hall of Flags at the Massachusetts State House.

SECTION III. COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

Presented below is a list of current commissioners in alphabetical order:

Member	Organization	Title
Gyasi Burks-Abbott	LEND Program, Boston Children’s Hospital, Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston	<i>Self-Advocate Faculty</i>
Charles Carr <i>(Chair, Legislative and Budget Subcommittee)</i>	Disability Policy Consortium	<i>Legislative Liaison</i>
Representative Gerard Cassidy	Massachusetts House of Representatives	<i>State Representative</i>
Representative Denise Garlick <i>(Chair)</i>	Massachusetts House of Representatives	<i>State Representative</i>
Craig Hall	Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council	<i>Deputy Director, Chief Financial Officer</i>
Nancy Garr-Colzie	Worcester Disability Commission, Center for Living & Working	<i>Member/Board Chair</i>
Representative Kay Khan	House of Representatives	<i>State Representative</i>
Andrew Levrault	Disabled Persons Protection Commission	<i>Deputy General Counsel</i>
Ann Lynch	Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office	<i>Assistant Attorney General</i>
Regina Marshall	Advocates	<i>Chief Operating Officer</i>
Felix Martinez		
Oswald Mondejar <i>(Clerk)</i>	Mucho Gusto Consulting	<i>President</i>
Representative Mathew Muratore	Massachusetts House of Representatives	<i>State Representative</i>
Bridget Murphy	Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, William Francis Galvin	<i>Project Manager</i>
Senator Patrick O’Connor	Massachusetts Senate	<i>State Senator</i>
Angela Ortiz <i>(Chair, Workforce Supports Subcommittee)</i>	Partners for Youth Disabilities, Massachusetts Pediatric Home Nursing Campaign	<i>Director of Business and Strategy, Parent & Founder</i>
Kathy Petkauskos <i>(Chair, Disability Employment Subcommittee)</i>	Work Without Limits, ForHealth Consulting at the UMass Chan Medical School	<i>Senior Director, Workplace Equity & Inclusion</i>
Carl Richardson <i>(Treasurer)</i>	Bureau of the State House	<i>ADA Coordinator and 504 Diversity Officer</i>
Rachel Stanton	Massachusetts Clean Water Trust, Office of the State Treasurer	<i>Investor Relations and Communications Graphic Designer</i>
Meghan Todd	City of Framingham	<i>Grants Manager</i>
Christopher White <i>(Vice Chair)</i>	Road To Responsibility, Inc. (RTR)	<i>President/CEO</i>

COMMISSIONERS EMERITI

Carla Kath, Nancy Rumbolt-Trzcinski, Dan Shannon, Paul W. Spooner, Kerry Thompson, Melinda Troy, Liz Zelnick



Photos by: Kristen Hourihan. **Description:** A photograph of six individuals sitting at a panel for the National Disability Employment Awareness Month Celebration.

SECTION IV. BACKGROUND

The [Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities](#) was established in [Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020](#). Commonly known as the law enforcement reform legislation, this landmark law aimed to improve equity and racial justice in every corner of the Commonwealth. The Commission’s charge is broad and empowers members to access data, study and make policy recommendations, receive and spend funds, and draft legislation to advance the cause of all persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth.

The Commission’s story, however, begins in 2019 with the work of Representative Josh Cutler, who as House Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, led the [WorkAbility Subcommittee](#) to develop recommendations to help remove barriers and promote disability hiring practices in the Commonwealth.

The WorkAbility report was the product of extensive research, including over 40 stakeholder meetings, 100 disability advocates, site visits to a dozen disability service providers and businesses, 39 pieces of public testimony and a public hearing at the State House. Among its recommendations was to establish a commission that “bridges both the Legislative and Executive branches and key stakeholder groups [to] ensure a permanent platform to the disability community and enhance communication.”

The law enforcement reform legislation provided a vehicle to address equity for all people with disabilities. With the Commission now in place and funding secured, members have been meeting to discuss topics related to its charge. In a vote by commissioners, we have focused on disability employment and the workforce supporting individuals with disabilities as our top priorities.

Commissioners are continuing to build relationships with each other and other key players in the disability community. Commissioners have a wide range of backgrounds and professions, including in the Legislature, executive branch, advocacy, provider, business, and through lived experience.

The Commission elected executive board members as follows:

- **Chair:** Representative Denise C. Garlick
- **Vice Chair:** Chris White
- **Treasurer:** Carl Richardson
- **Clerk:** Oz Mondejar

Members continue to lead the work by applying the value statements they created that were inspired by the [Work Matters: A Framework for States on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities](#), published in 2017 by the Council of State Governments (CSG) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). To learn more about these value statements, please refer to the Commission’s [FY21 annual report](#).

SECTION V. FY23 SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

As of filing of this report on October 29, 2023, the Commission has held five meetings during FY23, including two hybrid meetings to model best practices for inclusive and accessible public meetings. The Commission leads by example by securing American Sign Language interpreters and CART services for all meetings. Meeting minutes and materials are available on the Commission’s website (<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/permanent-commission-on-the-status-of-persons-with-disabilities>).

The meetings have been focused on the following:

- A. Hiring the Commission’s first full-time employee.
- B. Hiring the Commission’s first intern.
- C. Inviting several key stakeholders to present on topics related to the Commission’s broad scope.
- D. The subcommittees reporting back to the full Commission on their ongoing discussions and priorities, informed by multi-stakeholder inputs and data.
- E. A “Listening and Learning Tour”.
- F. Data shared by key partners and researchers.
- G. [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](#) (NDEAM) Signature Event.
- H. Establishment of FY24 Goals.

A. HIRING THE COMMISSION’S FIRST FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE

Several commissioners volunteered to be part of the search committee to hire the Commission’s first full-time employee, a program director, mandated by the statute. The main criteria for hiring were lived experience, work experience, education background and the ability to communicate effectively. After several rounds of interviews, a candidate was selected and started effective January 2023.

B. HIRING THE COMMISSION’S FIRST INTERN

The Commission, with support provided by MassAbility (formerly known as the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission), hired its first paid summer intern. The intern’s focus was on creating accessible content and outreach efforts through social media and designing the Commission’s first newsletter. The Commission will continue its partnership with MassAbility in hiring interns in the future.



Photos by: Kristen Hourihan. **Description:** A photograph of attendees at the National Disability Employment Awareness Month celebration.

C. STAKEHOLDER PRESENTATIONS

In June 2023, staff from Riverside Community Care presented to the Commission on their Regional Employment Collaborative (REC) initiative. The REC’s mission is to continuously expand the number of meaningful employment options available to individuals with disabilities who are viewed as valued employees by satisfied employers; facilitate collaboration to promote coordination & communications in engaging employers through a partnership approach; and increase employer workforce capacity by utilizing a diversity, equity and inclusion lens.

REC’s staff Stephanie Marks, Director of the Employment Collaboratives, Kristianne Widman, Assistant Director of the Employment Collaboratives, and Charles Powderly, Senior Project Coordinator for the Metro West Employment Collaborative, provided the Commission with an overview of the REC’s model, program offerings, the impact REC has on the community and an update on REC coverage in Massachusetts. The following data was shared:

Fiscal Year	Number of Offers Made	Number of Offers Accepted
FY21	778	768
FY22	1102*	1109*
FY23 (YTD)	1178	971

During the Covid Pandemic period from March 14, 2020, to May 11, 2023, organizations in MA collaborated to support 2,795 people obtaining work. A copy of REC’s presentation can be accessed at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/overview-final-reg-employment-collaboratives-slides-6-14-23-mtg-version-2/download>

* The reason that the offers made are 1102 and offers accepted is 1109 is because sometimes those that report do not include all the data once someone is placed.

D. SUBCOMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS

Subcommittees were formed to focus on the Commission’s goals. Each subcommittee elected a Chair and meet in months the full Commission does not. The subcommittees are as follows:

- a. **Disability Employment** chaired by Kathy Petkauskos
- b. **Workforce Supports** chaired by Angela Ortiz
- c. **Legislative and Budget** chaired by Charles Carr

a. Disability Employment Subcommittee Report:

Subcommittee Members:

- Chair, Kathy Petkauskos
- Representative Mathew Muratore
- Oz Mondejar
- Chris White
- Carl Richardson
- Gyasi Burks-Abbott

Charge:

Collect data and analyze initiatives that increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in private employment and state government.

Summary of Activities:

The subcommittee met six times in FY23 and has had nearly perfect attendance of subcommittee members, demonstrating a high level of commitment and interest towards advancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities in MA.

This subcommittee has leveraged the WorkAbility Report as a guidepost to steer discussions amongst its members; additionally, members have raised relevant topics that are of interest to them, including:

- Engaging and educating employers with a focus on small to mid-sized organizations.
- The effect work income has on public benefits.
- Relevant legislation such as the [Federal Savings Penalty Elimination Act \(S. 4102\)](#) and the [Websites and Software Applications Accessibility Act \(S.4998\)](#).

The subcommittee has hosted three guest speakers to educate its members and build a foundation for their work going forward. Copies of speakers' presentations and meeting recordings can be found on the Commission's website (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/disability-employment-subcommittee>).

Speakers and topics included:

- Nicole LeBlanc – Maryland Medicaid Buy-In (MBI) program.
- Joe Reale, MassAbility – the new MA Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC).
- Becky Curran Kekula, Disability: IN – Disability Equality Index (DEI), a disability inclusion benchmarking tool for Fortune 1000 employers.

Upcoming guest speakers include:

- November 2023 – The Plan of MA and RI – Special Needs Trusts
- January 2024 – MassAbility Commissioner Toni Wolf – Recent work with consulting firm Accenture regarding employment barriers related to benefits.

Last, on October 11, 2023, in conjunction with the Commission's celebration of NDEAM, the subcommittee hosted a panel presentation entitled Work Is Possible: SSI and SSDI Myths Debunked. The panel was co-facilitated by subcommittee chair Kathy Petkauskos and Commission program director Imene Bouziane Saidi. Panel of experts included Linda Landry, MA Disability Law Center; Brian Forsythe, Work Without Limits; and Andrea Jackson, MassAbility Project IMPACT.

Subcommittee Recommendations:

1. Continue to educate subcommittee members on the barriers to employment for people with disabilities including youth and young adults as well as available resources and best practices.
2. Seek opportunities to cross-collaborate with the Commission's Workforce Supports, and Legislative and Budget subcommittees.
3. Identify and seek opportunities to collaborate with existing resources and initiatives that can help further our goals. For example, chambers of commerce; small business associations, i.e., restaurant, retail, health and human services; benefits counseling programs; apprenticeships, and other disability employment and workforce development programs including those specifically for youth and young adults with disabilities.

FY24 Goals:

1. By December 31, 2024, identify and facilitate at least one opportunity (e.g., event, speaking engagement, information dissemination) to engage and educate at least 100 small and medium businesses/employers on the value of including people with disabilities in the workplace, available community resources, and recognition of effective employer practices.

2. By December 31, 2024, formulate strategies that will decrease or eliminate the impact work income has on public benefits.

b. Workforce Supports Subcommittee Report:

Subcommittee Members:

- Chair, Angela Ortiz
- Representative Kay Khan
- Andrew Levrault
- Chris White

Charge:

Collect data and analyze initiatives that address the workforce crisis for people who provide services to individuals with disabilities.

Summary of Activities:

The subcommittee has met four times in FY23. Given the subcommittee's charge, members decided early on that the most meaningful way to obtain workforce data and analyze initiatives was to dedicate meetings to panel discussions of key stakeholders (e.g., those deeply knowledgeable and/or impacted by the workforce crisis) so members could learn more about their experiences. Panelists have included individuals with disabilities in need of services, provider agency representatives, direct support professionals, disability advocacy organizations, union representatives, and research institutions. Meeting recordings can be found [here](#).

Knowing the workforce crisis is complex and multifaceted, members wanted to ensure that the unique lenses and perspectives of diverse stakeholders were represented. The subcommittee identified topic areas and questions relating to the scope of the problem, potential causes, impacts and recommendations, especially around short- and long-term strategies. These were sent to panelists prior to each meeting and served as a guide to facilitate these discussions.

The Workforce Supports subcommittee held two separate panel discussions with a total of seven panelists:

Workforce Support Panel 1 - May 11, 2023

- Bill Henning, Executive Director, Boston Center for Independent Living
- Jake Krilovich, Executive Director, Home Care Alliance of MA
- Maura Sullivan, Senior Director of Government Affairs and Health Policy, Arc of MA

Workforce Support Panel 2 - June 8, 2023

- Rebecca Gutman, Vice President of Home Care, 1199SEIU, United Healthcare Workers
- Elizabeth Sharon, Personal Care Attendant (PCA)
- Dan Greaney, PCA Consumer Employer
- Dr. Fatima Watt, Chief Executive Officer at Pappas Rehab Hospital for Children under the Department of Public Health

The subcommittee is continuing to host Listening Sessions and have had several panel sessions during FY24 including with Ellen Attaliades, CEO, Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers; Mary McGeown, Undersecretary, Executive Office of Health and Human Services; Michael Weekes, CEO and Bill Yelenak, COO, Providers' Council; Barbara L'Italien, Executive Director, Rick Glassman, Director of Advocacy and Hillary Dunn Stanisz, Senior Attorney, Disability Law Center.

A presentation was conducted by Valerie Bradley of the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI), who examined Direct Service Professionals (DSP) turnover and tenure in Massachusetts using National Core Indicators-Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) state of the workforce survey data.



Artwork by: Charles Johnson, Gateway Arts. Acrylic, 10.75 inches x 8.25 inches.

Description: Acrylic painting of a sunrise or sunset over an ocean.

Upcoming Speakers:

- Capstone Presentation (Date TBD): Dr. Fatima Watt, Chief Executive Officer at Pappas Rehab Hospital for Children under the Department of Public Health.

Subcommittee Recommendations:

Given the complexity of the issue, the Workforce Supports Subcommittee has been in an exploratory phase of hearing and learning from multiple stakeholders, gathering data from diverse sources, identifying common threads, and seeing what short- and long-term strategies have been proposed to our agencies, piloted, or implemented in other states (i.e., New York). Effective strategies will continue to evolve.

FY24 Goals:

Goals are informed by subcommittee members and include:

1. Gaining access to state and provider agency data and compiling a comprehensive list of solutions and strategies (i.e., day programs).
2. Connecting with neighboring progressive states who are implementing/piloting creative and innovative ideas to address the workforce crisis.

3. Assisting with the HSRI survey on aging adults with disabilities data.
4. Identifying the subcommittee's role in support of professionalizing Direct Service Professionals.



Photograph by: Spaulding JobLab. **Description:** A photograph of six staff and Commissioners at Spaulding JobLab. All are wearing masks, and one individual is in a wheelchair.

E. COMMISSION ON THE ROAD: LISTENING AND LEARNING TOUR

From March through May 2023, Chair Garlick and Program Director Bouziane Saidi went on a “listening and learning tour” of most commissioners’ places of work. This was an opportunity to meet with commissioners and their colleagues, to learn about their workplace priorities and concerns and how those align with the Commission’s mission and vision, and to strengthen partnerships and opportunities to collaborate as the Commission continues to establish itself.

These visits were extremely valuable because of insight from people with disabilities, workforce providers, community advocates and legislators. A summary of what was discussed during these visits include:

- The human services workforce is in crisis; openings for direct service professionals and frontline workers represent the majority of unfilled positions.
 - Persons with disabilities go months, sometimes years, without any support for their activities of daily living, employment, and recreational activities.
 - There is a critical wage issue, i.e., employees leave the health and human services sectors for better pay, benefits and work/life balance. Nearly all occupations common to human services earn median wages which are below Massachusetts overall.
 - Human services workers are predominantly women, people of color, nearly one-quarter are foreign born, and they are more likely than workers in other industries to have a disability.
- MassHealth leadership should hear directly from enrollees about their lived experiences.
- Misalignment between hospitals, specialists, and people with disabilities results in a loss of continuity of care, and the inability to access prescriptions and providers.
- According to the [US Census Bureau Data](#), the poverty rate for Black people with disabilities is at 36%, the highest among any group.

- One of the barriers to going to work is the [MA Estate Recovery](#) program.
 - The State House is committed to accessibility, including physical access and accessibility for individuals with visual or hearing impairments. There is a commitment to make the State House even more accessible, i.e., how a person with a disability is treated when they enter the building, and access to interpretation services.
 - The Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin and Massachusetts Office on Disability have partnered to build access for voters with disabilities.
 - Spaulding Rehab Network’s JobLab Training and Workforce Development Center focuses on workforce development and competitive job placement of persons with disabilities from entry level skills to various chief officer positions. This has the potential to be reproduced at a larger, statewide scale.
 - One of the biggest barriers to employment for persons with disabilities are the myths surrounding losing Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) when gaining employment. There are ways for the path to self-sufficiency but educating the public is essential.
 - Elevate the value proposition of including people with disabilities in the workplace as employees, customers and suppliers by engaging and educating employers and businesses.



Photograph by: Road to Responsibility, Inc. **Description:** A photograph of six individuals are standing and smiling in front of a colorful wall that reads 'Respect Others Self Environment'.

F. DATA SHARED AND DISCUSSED BY KEY PARTNERS

Data collection and analysis is an essential part of good policy and is central to the Commission’s charge. The following data points have been shared by key stakeholders at meetings held by Commission members and researched by the program director.

Disability Employment by Numbers:

- Employment has been determined to be a critical social determinant of health by a study from the American Journal of Industrial Medicine, as employment can provide a source of income, health insurance coverage, social connections or sense of purpose.
- According to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (nationwide):
 - 61% of persons with disabilities aren't counted towards labor force participation data due to extensive obstacles preventing this group from actively looking for work.
 - In 2022, 21.3% of persons with a disability were employed compared to 65.4% for persons without a disability.
 - The unemployment rate for persons with a disability (7.6%) was about twice as high as the rate for persons without a disability (3.5%).
 - Across all age groups, persons with a disability were much less likely to be employed than those with no disability.
 - 30% percent of workers with a disability were employed part time, compared with 16% for those with no disability.
 - Employed persons with a disability were more likely to be self-employed than those with no disability.
 - Persons with a disability were less likely to have completed a bachelor's degree or higher than were those with no disability.
 - Among both groups, those who had attained higher levels of education were more likely to be employed than those who had attained less education.
 - Across all levels of education in 2022, persons with a disability were much less likely to be employed than their counterparts with no disability.
 - Individuals who are neither working nor seeking work are not counted in the labor force. A large proportion of persons with a disability, nearly 8 in 10, were not in the labor force in 2022, compared with about 3 in 10 of those with no disability.
 - In MA, the current unemployment rate for persons with a disability in MA is 13%, more than triple than their non-disabled counterparts at 3.5%.
- Individuals with disabilities are a large talent pool ready to bring their skills to work. Reasonable accommodations and accessible workplace cultures, among other factors, are critical for employment access and success.
- Educating employers of all sizes on the value of hiring a person with a disability is vital:
 - [Disability: IN](#) created the Disability Equality Index (DEI), which is a comprehensive benchmarking tool that helps companies build a roadmap of measurable, tangible actions that they can take to achieve disability inclusion and equality.
- There are many reasons that can explain the disproportion in employment and labor force data for persons with a disability. Research shows these barriers include:
 - not having adequate transportation access,
 - physically inaccessible buildings,
 - lack of access to adaptive technology,
 - inflexible workplace policies,
 - lack of affordable, high-quality childcare,
 - lack of mental health support,
 - stigma and employer bias, and
 - myths about public assistance benefits tied to income limitations.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected people with disabilities in the workforce. Despite recent gains showing historically higher rates of employment for persons with disabilities during the pandemic due to flexible accommodations in the workplace, unemployed individuals with disabilities and lower labor force participation among those with disabilities rates continue to stay high.

- The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are federal laws that protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination in employment and the job application process. However, even with these federal safeguards, the efforts made from states are critical to support bridging the unemployment rate and increasing the labor force participation rate for persons with disabilities.
- People with disabilities are not participating in the “Great Resignation” (the recent uptick in workers voluntarily resigning from their jobs en masse), unlike their counterparts without disabilities. The increase in work-from-home arrangements and greater flexibility in work hours seen during the height of the pandemic may have permanently opened new employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Current policy landscape:

- Policy initiative task forces have developed workable solutions in creating a disability inclusive workforce. The [Work Matters policy framework](#) includes information on state hiring of people with disabilities, transportation, work-based learning, and private-sector capacity building.
- MA Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC) was introduced in the fiscal year 2022 state budget approved by the Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Baker.
 - DETC provides a refundable credit of up to \$5,000 for hiring a qualified person with a disability in the first year and an additional \$2,000 every year after. MassAbility has an online certification form for this credit program.
 - This tax incentive program can help to open doors to employment opportunities for people with disabilities who may have been previously overlooked.

Workforce Crisis Impact on Persons with Disabilities and Providers:

- The Arc of Massachusetts is seeing a 27% to 40% workforce vacancy rate. There are thousands who aren’t being served, including those who are turning 22.
- Most underserved persons are increasing in numbers: 3,000 of those individuals are adults with an Intellectual or Developmental Disability (IDD), including Autism Spectrum Disorder, and those with complex needs.
- MA Disability Law Center conducted a survey for individuals or family members of individuals with disabilities who are having difficulty returning to day habilitation, community-based day supports or both. Results show:
 - As a result of not being able to attend day habilitation, individuals with disabilities experienced the following: anxiety over 50%, depression 32%, behavioral challenges 53%, loss of skills managing activities of daily living 50%.
- The individuals with the highest needs are the last to be receiving services as they require intensive supports; the workforce shortage compounds this issue.
- The [March 2023 Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers Workforce Survey](#) indicated that:
 - 3,887 people with IDD are on waitlists for day services:
 - 1,472 on Department of Developmental Services waitlist
 - 1,869 people on waitlist for MassHealth day habilitation waitlist.
 - These numbers include people who attended day programs prior to the pandemic and people who are newly eligible for services.
- The MA Home Care Alliance is seeing over 90% of their member agencies having vacancies in their agencies.

- There is a 27% vacancy rate across the human services spectrum, with spikes in certain geographic areas that are “deserts” (Cape Cod area for example) due to several factors such as staff having difficulty finding affordable housing.
- Low wages, lack of a better pay structure, lack of benefits, lack of housing are driving the workforce shortage.
- 92% of providers are struggling to achieve their quality standards and it leads to people leaving the health and human services workforce because they don’t feel trained.
- The median income of human services workers is just \$34,273 – \$15,000 less than the median income for the state overall, which comes in at \$49,750.
- There is a critical equity challenge: women and people of color are significantly represented in the human services workforce, particularly within the lowest paying positions.
- The aging population in the United States has significant implications for the healthcare industry. By 2050, the U.S. Census predicts that 19.6 million American workers will be 65 years or older, roughly 19% of the total U.S. workforce.



Photograph by: Kristen Hourihan. **Description:** A photograph of attendees sitting and clapping at the NDEAM celebration event.

G. NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH INAUGURAL SIGNATURE EVENT

In March 2023, planning commenced for the Commission’s [Inaugural National Disability Employment Awareness Month celebration](#) scheduled in October 2023, during FY24. Close to 200 diverse stakeholders joined the main event celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month on October 5 at the State House.

The event focused on two Commission goals this year: (1) promoting disability employment as an answer to the workforce crisis to improve Massachusetts' competitiveness across industries and (2) the workforce serving individuals with disabilities that is in crisis. The Commissioners' goals were to raise disability employment awareness and celebrate champions in the Commonwealth by:

1. Celebrating employees with disabilities and their employment success stories.
2. Highlighting a diverse pool of employers who create and sustain an intentional inclusive work environment. The Commission's Planning Committee created a [nomination form](#) in efforts to identify awardees.
3. Celebrating direct service providers who assist persons with disabilities to obtain, retain, and advance in employment.
4. Recognize legislators for their continuous work on behalf of persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth.
5. Providing a series of events with subject matter experts on employment, public benefits and the workforce crisis. These panels had strong attendances of 50 to 80 participants.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Kate Walsh presented the keynote and spoke on the state's support for employing people with disabilities and supporting the workforce that provides supports for individuals with disabilities. *"When we prioritize hiring people with disabilities, everyone wins. We can address the on-going workforce crisis, foster independence, and become a stronger workforce with a better understanding of the lived experience of people with disabilities,"* said **Secretary Walsh**.

"We need to take this opportunity to breakdown stigma and become more inclusive. I'm grateful to the Commission for their efforts, as well as to our own staff at MassAbility and other agencies who provide opportunities for people every day to find paths to employment for people with disabilities across the state."

Lawmakers Honored:

The Commission honored policymakers for their leadership in disability employment, including **Senate President Karen Spilka** and **Representative Josh Cutler**. President Spilka has been a long-time champion of disability rights, putting them at the forefront of her and the Senate's legislative priorities. Rep. Cutler's work chairing the Labor and Workforce Development Committee has advanced individuals with disabilities as a solution to the workforce crisis, and his work in the 2019 WorkAbility Report has been integral to the Commission and working with **Speaker Ron Mariano** to advance disability policy in the House of Representatives.

"I am deeply grateful to be recognized by the Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and even more grateful for the Commission's advocacy for disability rights," said **Senate President Karen E. Spilka**.

"This month and every month, I'm proud to stand alongside people with disabilities, who have made incalculable contributions to our workplaces and strengthen our economy every day. While we have made significant strides in recent years, there is more work to do to create truly fair workplaces for people with disabilities. I look forward to continuing to stand at the forefront of this issue, in pursuit of the true opportunity, respect, and equality that persons with disabilities in our workplaces are entitled to."

"Senate President Spilka has shown unwavering dedication and selfless commitment to improving the lives of people with disabilities and has had a profound impact on our Commonwealth because of her work," said **Senator Patrick O'Connor**.

"Throughout her career, President Spilka has championed the rights of people with disabilities and has taught us in the Senate the power of empathy, understanding, and the importance of creating an environment where everyone can thrive."

“Thank you to the Commission for all your efforts to promote workforce development for persons with disabilities. I am honored to be recognized with this award. We know that disability inclusive hiring practices are not just the right thing to do, they are also the smart thing to do,” said **Rep. Josh Cutler**, House Chairman of the Labor and Workforce Development Committee. *“It’s incumbent on all of us to find ways to remove barriers to employment and ensure that all persons have the opportunity to succeed in the workplace. Given the tight labor market we are now in, there has never been a better -- or more important -- time to do so.”*

“Rep. Cutler has worked tirelessly to make the workplace a more inclusive space for all who want the dignity, respect and opportunity that a job can provide. I have personally met many individuals who have made incredible contributions to their workplace, and they are some of the most dedicated and hard-working individuals I have met. I am thrilled to see someone as truly deserving as Chair Cutler receiving this award and I am inspired to continue to work to make employment available and inclusive for everyone.”

2023 National Disability Employment Awareness Month Employer Award Recipients:

Two organizations were selected as NDEAM honorees for their exemplary work creating and sustaining an intentional disability inclusive work environment. **MicroTek**, a technology company located in Chicopee, MA, was named as the small-to-midsize honoree, and **Liberty Mutual Insurance** was named as the large organization honoree.

“MicroTek is honored to receive the inaugural MA Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities National Disability Employment Awareness Month Award,” said **Erin Weinman**, Executive Vice President.

“Since MicroTek’s founding in 1983, our mission has been to support individuals with developmental disabilities to achieve their employment goals. We believe that everyone has value and should have the opportunity for meaningful work that furthers their personal fulfillment and financial stability. We hope that this award and the Commission’s celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month shines a light on a valuable pool of potential employees who are ready and motivated to put their talents to work.”

“It is an incredible honor to be recognized for our efforts to remove barriers of access and build an equitable and inclusive workplace for people with disabilities,” said Liberty Mutual Chief Sustainability Officer **Francis Hyatt**.

“As the co-executive sponsor of the Able@Liberty Employee Resource Group, I am so proud of the work we’ve done to evolve policies, benefits and infrastructure to create a more accessible workplace for all.”

2023 Employment Support Champion Award Recipient

The NDEAM Employment Support Champion honoree was **Vanessa Stewart**, a career development specialist at WORK Inc. Vanessa has provided invaluable support to individuals with disabilities seeking meaningful employment opportunities. *“Having a disability should not mean being disqualified from having access to every aspect of life,”* Stewart said.

H. FUTURE WORK

The Commission is consistently moving forward to advance the cause of all persons with disabilities. We continue to address workforce issues, including disability employment and the workforce who serves individuals with disabilities, as we shore up the foundations of our work for the future.



Artwork by: David O'Toole, Gateway Arts. Colored Pencil, 10.75 inches x 8.25 inches.
Description: Colored pencil painting of trees with a colorful patchwork sky.



MASSACHUSETTS PERMANENT COMMISSION ON
THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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OCTOBER 18, 2023

MASSACHUSETTS



COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
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CONTACT US

Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

24 Beacon Street | PO Box 34 | Boston, MA 02133

Website: mass.gov/orgs/permanent-commission-on-the-status-of-persons-with-disabilities

Representative Denise Garlick, Chair

Email: Denise.Garlick@mahouse.gov

Imene Bouziane Saidi, Program Director

Email: Imene.BouzianeSaidi@mass.gov

