

Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Commission Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, September 11th, 2024

Time: 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Place: Hybrid

In Person Hearing Room B1

MA State House

24 Beacon Street,

Boston, MA, 02108

Members Present	
1	Gyasi Burks-Abbott – LEND Faculty, Boston Children’s Hospital/UMass Boston Institute for Community Inclusion
2	Charles Carr – Disability Policy Consortium
3	Representative Denise Garlick – House of Representatives
4	Craig Hall – Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council
5	Representative Kay Khan – House of Representatives
6	Andrew Levrault – Disabled Persons Protection Commission
7	Ann Lynch – Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office
8	Reginal Marshall – Advocates
9	Oswald Mondejar – Mucho Gusto Consulting
10	Representative Mathew Muratore – House of Representatives
11	Bridget Murphy – Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin
12	Angela Ortiz – MA Health Council
13	Kathy Petkauskos – University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School
14	Lexi Semanchik – State Treasurer’s Office
15	Rachel Stanton – State Treasurer’s Office
16	Christopher White – Road to Responsibility, Inc (RTR)
Members Not Present	
17	Representative Gerard Cassidy – House of Representatives
18	Carl Richardson – State House ADA Coordinator
19	Meghan Todd – City of Framingham
20	Nancy Garr-Colzie – Member, Worcester Disability Commission; Board Chair, Center for Living and Working
21	Felix Martinez
22	Senator Patrick O’Connor – Senate

Proceedings

1. Welcome, Roll Call, Approval of 6.12.24 Meeting Minutes
2. [MA Department of Economic Research Project Presentation](#) by Chief Economist Mark Rembert and Senior Applied Economist David Jan

Key Takeaways:

- **Employment of Individuals with Disabilities in the Executive Branch:**
 - **Representation:** Approximately 3.4% (about 1,550 individuals) of executive branch employees identified as having a disability in Q4 FY2024.
 - **Comparison with General Workforce:** The American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2018 to 2022 indicates that 6.3% of state government workers and 5.5% of workers outside state government identified as having a disability. This suggests that the Commonwealth employs a higher proportion of individuals with disabilities compared to the broader economy.
 - **Departmental Distribution:** The Health and Human Services department employs over 50% of executive branch workers who identify as having a disability.
 - **Occupational Roles:** Nearly 90% of these employees work in professional, official, administrative, or clerical positions.
 - **Tenure and Age:** More than 75% have over 10 years of service, and there is an underrepresentation of younger workers (ages 20-30) with disabilities.
- **Impact of Benefit Cliffs on Workforce Participation:**
 - **Definition:** A benefit cliff occurs when a small increase in employment income leads to a significant decrease in total income due to the abrupt loss of benefits, creating a disincentive to pursue higher-paying employment.
 - **SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance):** Provides consistent benefits until earnings reach a threshold (\$18,600 annually), after which benefits are terminated, resulting in a steep benefit cliff.
 - **SSI (Supplemental Security Income):** Benefits phase out more gradually, with every \$1,000 of earnings leading to a \$500 decrease in benefits, resulting in a less severe cliff.
 - **Combined Program Effects:** Individuals often receive multiple benefits (e.g., housing subsidies, SNAP), and the combined phase-out rates can create significant income troughs, especially when transitioning from part-time to full-time employment.
- **Labor Market Scenarios:**
 - **Full-Time Employment:** Many common occupations for SSDI recipients have median earnings between \$18,000 and \$36,000. To avoid an income trough, individuals would need to secure positions with earnings above the benefit cliff threshold.

- **Part-Time Employment:** Most part-time jobs have median earnings below the SSDI benefit cliff threshold, allowing individuals to work without losing benefits. However, higher-paying part-time positions are less common.
- **Recommendations:**
 - **Addressing the Skills Gap:** Invest in robust training and upskilling programs to help individuals with disabilities secure higher-paying jobs that surpass benefit cliff thresholds.
 - **Promoting Quality Part-Time Opportunities:** Encourage the creation of quality part-time positions across various industries to provide flexible employment options without the risk of losing benefits. sepac@sscps.org

Q&A Highlights

- Does the ACS ([American Community Survey](#)) data cover all of the U.S. or just Massachusetts?
 - The data pertains only to Massachusetts. However, comparisons are not entirely consistent, as ACS has a broader definition of disability. This is not a 1:1 comparison but highlights divergences in the data.
- Discussion on COVID-19's impact and remote work as an identified need:
 - Post-COVID data shows an increase in the prevalence of disclosed disabilities among workers. Data is currently available only through 2022.
- Question about diving deeper into the types of disabilities represented in the workforce:
 - Analysis could be expanded using ACS sample data to explore types of disabilities and job roles. This will be added as a potential future analysis area.
- Observation about Executive Branch employees and specific job positions:
 - It was noted that more than 40% of Executive Branch employees have worked for over 20 years, suggesting seniority and progression in roles. This trend differs from the general population and does not appear to be the result of specific efforts to place people in these roles.
 - Discussion on the need for strategies to support a younger workforce:
 - i. The data suggests opportunities for initiatives aimed at engaging and supporting younger workers.
 - Comment on the dynamics of disability onset:
 - i. Workers who develop disabilities later in life may experience different challenges compared to those born with disabilities, particularly in terms of stigma.

3. 2024 National Disability Employment Awareness Month Event Update

- Imene thanked the Planning Committee members (Carl, Rachel, Regina, Craig, Oz, and Lexi) for their dedication and insights in organizing the second annual event.
- Highlighted key aspects of the upcoming NDEAM 2024 event:
 - Panel discussions on voting rights and accessible democracy.
 - Recognition of Legislative Champions, employees with disabilities, inclusive employers, and direct support providers.

- Submitted a Proclamation request to the Governor's office, incorporating labor force data and federal language from the Office of Disability Employment Policy.
- Received 8 employer nominations (three large, five small/mid-sized) evaluated on criteria including:
 - Full and comprehensive responses.
 - Commitment to paid employment for people with disabilities.
 - Inclusive human resources policies.
 - Alignment with the organization's mission.
- Announced 2024 honorees:
 - Small to Mid-Sized Employer: Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston.
 - Large Employer: Eversource Energy.
- Shared criteria for the Legislative Champion Award, evaluated on:
 - Disability-related legislation sponsorship/co-sponsorship.
 - Holding office.
 - Prioritization of disability issues.
 - Recognition for disability advocacy and committee involvement.
- Honorees for Legislative Champion Award: Senator Michael Barrett and Representative John Lawn.
- Direct Service Provider Award nomination is pending and updates will follow.
- Imene shared the events fliers and social media language to post.

Event Schedule:

- 11am to 12pm – Voting Rights Panel: Accessible Democracy discussion focusing on eliminating voting barriers for people with disabilities and fostering civic engagement.
- 12:30pm to 2pm – Main Event (Great Hall of Flags):
- 2:30pm to 3pm – Fireside Chat: "Bridging Gaps in Disability Employment" with hiring managers and employees with disabilities, exploring inclusive workplace strategies.

4. Subcommittees Reports and Annual Report Discussion

- Subcommittee reports summary from recent activities can be found [here](#).
- Annual Report:
 - Draft report to be circulated the first week of November.
 - A special meeting to gather feedback and comments is scheduled for November 6.
 - Those unable to attend are encouraged to submit input via email to Imene.

5. Commissioner Announcements

- Chair Garlick invited everyone to her office following the NDEAM event.
- Chris shared information about Collin Killick's work [on health equity](#) at the Disability Policy Consortium.

- Craig provided an update on the 2024 Paul W. Spooner Generational Leadership Summit, hosted by the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council, the Boston Center for Independent Living, and the Disability Policy Consortium:
 - The event will take place from September 23–25, 2024.
 - This is the second year of the summit, and alumni from the first year have been intentionally included to mentor and collaborate with the new class of participants.
 - Planning for 2025 has already begun, with a focus on engaging more stakeholders in the planning workgroup. The Commission and other statewide advocacy organizations are involved, with a goal of strengthening collaboration to develop self-advocate leaders.
 - More information can be found at [Paul Spooner Generational Leadership Summit](#).
- Angela announced her new position as Executive Director of the Massachusetts Health Council.

6. Adjournment