

Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Commission Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, June 12, 2024

Time: 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Place: Hybrid

In Person Hearing Room A2

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	Kathy Petkauskos – University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School
13	Rachel Stanton – State Treasurer’s Office
14	Christopher White – Road to Responsibility, Inc (RTR)
Members Not Present	
15	Representative Gerard Cassidy – House of Representatives
16	Angela Ortiz – Partners for Youth with Disabilities
17	Carl Richardson – State House ADA Coordinator
18	Meghan Todd – City of Framingham
19	Nancy Garr-Colzie – Member, Worcester Disability Commission; Board Chair, Center for Living and Working
20	Felix Martinez
21	Senator Patrick O’Connor – Senate

Proceedings

- Welcome, Roll Call, Approval of 3.13.24 meeting minutes
- MA Department of Economic Research (DER) Project Overview:
 1. Mark Rembert and David Jan from the Massachusetts Department of Economic Research were welcomed back to discuss their collaboration on [two key projects](#):
 - an analysis of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as an employer of people with disabilities (focus on the Executive Branch), and
 - the effect of benefit cliffs on labor force participation among people with a disability.

These initiatives are crucial for enhancing economic conditions and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities and align with the priorities set forth in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan. Their expertise will greatly contribute to these efforts, and anyone interested in learning more or contributing is encouraged to contact Imene at imene.bouzianesaidi@mass.gov.

2. Q&A Discussion

- Disability Employment Subcommittee Chair Kathy Petkauskos reported that she, along with representatives from the Department of Economic Research and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), recently met to discuss MRC's collaboration with Accenture on raising awareness and influencing policy related to the benefit cliffs issue.
- She and Imene also met with the [State Exchange on Employment and Disability](#) (SEED), a program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, which focuses on analyzing and sharing information about state policies and programs related to disability employment. SEED will be providing insights specific to Massachusetts. These federal and state initiatives are critical for us to stay informed about, and this Commission can continue to serve as a central hub for disseminating that information.

- What do hiring practices look like at the state level, and what training is available for hiring managers?
- Will you be examining the relationship between people with disabilities seeking employment and their guardians?
 - Oz offered to connect Mark and David with contacts at Mass Brigham for further insights on this dynamic.
- Will your research include data on people with disabilities who have been promoted, or will it focus solely on initial hiring?
 - The data collection phase is still ongoing. The Department of Human Resources has a [demographic dashboard for state employees](#), which includes data on promotions for individuals with disabilities.
- Is transportation data included in the dashboard? The lack of accessible MBTA services is a significant barrier to employment. Accessible public transportation is a critical component of employment for people with disabilities, and it's essential to address this issue as part of the overall analysis.
- It's crucial for the Commonwealth to set an example as a model employer for others in the state. Training for employers on interacting with employees with disabilities, fostering inclusion, and replacing stereotypes with knowledge can make a significant difference.
- In all sectors, we must start where we have influence, and for us, that's within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Our partnership with DER allows us to demonstrate leadership, pilot innovative ideas, and share what works and what barriers exist. The data from DER will be instrumental, and the Commonwealth's role as an employer is vital to providing us with real-world experience we can build on.
- The Governor's recent [executive order to remove educational requirements and emphasize skills-based qualifications](#), including volunteer work, is a valuable step forward.

- Subcommittees Reports

1. Disability Employment focus and conversation:

- Employer Engagement:

- The subcommittee is working on creating a video to highlight small to mid-sized companies that are committed to including people with disabilities in their workforce and have found success in doing so.
- Three small to mid-sized employers, representing different industries and regions of the state, have expressed interest. While not yet confirmed, the industries involved include manufacturing, human services, and financial services. The goal is to showcase the variety of fields where people with disabilities can excel.

- Video Production:

- The subcommittee is currently searching for a videography production vendor and is in the process of checking references.
- The aim is to complete the video in time for the October signature event. The video will be used to educate and raise awareness among small to mid-sized employers, particularly those that may not have the same resources as larger companies. It will serve as a valuable resource for promoting inclusion.

- Benefit Cliff:

- With DER's ongoing work on the benefit cliff, the subcommittee will be exploring opportunities to collaborate with them on this critical issue.

2. Workforce Supports focus and conversation:

- Guest Speakers:

- The subcommittee continues to host excellent speakers. Recently, Beth Bostic, Assistant Director for the Division for Children & Youth with Special Health Needs at the MA Department of Public Health, presented on an initiative addressing the

[respite crisis for caregivers of children and youth with special health needs.](#)

- In July, the subcommittee will host Patricia Wu, Director of Workforce Policy from the Executive Office on Health and Human Services (EOHHS), who will discuss the state's response to current challenges and serve as a liaison between EOHHS and HSRI.
- Future Presentations:
 - This fall, the Administration for Community Living will present on their Direct Care Workforce Strategies Center and its new initiatives.
- Collaboration with SEED:
 - The subcommittee had a meeting with Concepts, Inc., on behalf of the State Exchange on Employment & Disability and is eager to continue discussions on the national workforce landscape and state-by-state comparisons, to leverage best practices from neighboring states.
- Craig's Comments:
 - The Department of Labor, overseeing SEED projects, issued a grant in partnership with the Council of State Governments to address employment challenges for people with disabilities. This led to the development of the "[Work Matters](#)" report, now published on the Commission's website. Massachusetts has been a leader in this area. SEED remains a valuable resource for data and insights, with a strong passion for the subject.
 - The chair suggested sharing the Commission's work with DER with SEED for potential collaboration.
 - Kathy noted that while SEED focuses nationally, the Commission operates at a state level. SEED offers cross-references of best practices in disability employment. Kathy highlighted the [Massachusetts Central Accommodation Fund](#) and mentioned Minnesota's Governor funding a similar initiative for small businesses. SEED is

interested in presenting their work to the Commission.

- Additional Resources:
 - A mental health policy toolkit is available for reference: [Mental Health Matters: A Series of National Online Dialogues on Workforce Mental Health Policies](#).

3. Legislative and Budget focus and conversation:

- Charlie's Update:
 - The Estate Recovery issue has passed through the Senate Healthcare and Finance Committee and is now in Senate Ways and Means, where it has been for about three months. The key concern is the CommonHealth program, a Medicaid buy-in program, which the Commission was briefed on previously.
 - The PCA (Personal Care Attendant) Program is a hot topic currently. MassHealth's PCA program was reduced by \$110 million, but this amount has been restored in both the House and Senate budgets. An amendment, proposed by Senator Kennedy and included in the Senate, ensures that the PCA program cannot undergo major structural changes without a public hearing and an independent assessment entity (IAE). This program impacts 280,000 people.
- Disability Caucus:
 - There is significant interest in reviving the Disability Caucus in the House and Senate.
- Recent Speakers:
 - The Commission recently hosted Maura Sullivan from the Arc of MA, who provided [an update on their legislative priorities and gave a simplified overview of the legislative advocacy process](#).
 - Representative Jay Livingstone and Senator Robyn Kennedy from the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities were also engaged in discussions on legislative matters

impacting the community.

- October 2024 National Disability Employment Awareness Month update:
 1. Planning Committee Leadership:
 - Acknowledgment and thanks were extended to Regina, Rachel, Oz, Carl, and Craig for their leadership of the Planning Committee for the second annual Disability Employment Celebration Awareness Month.
 - The Planning Committee has been meeting monthly to coordinate all aspects of the event.
 2. Event Details:
 - This year's celebration will be held on Wednesday, October 23, 2024, starting at 11:00 am at the State House, with virtual access provided via zoom. ASL and CART interpreters will be requested.
 - Based on feedback, both the panels and the main event will be incorporated into the same day.
 - The event will feature a panel on voting rights and a disability employment fireside chat, including perspectives from hiring managers and employees with disabilities.
 3. Main Event Format:
 - The format from last year will be similar to last year's, including the awarding of businesses excelling in disability inclusion, recognition of legislator champions, and honoring direct service employees who provide exceptional employment support.
 - The event will celebrate the progress and achievements in disability employment and inclusion.
- Commissioner Announcements
 1. Oz's Update:
 - The [Health Equity Compact](#) held its second annual summit with 500 attendees. Disability was frequently discussed, and Oz noted that there is much at stake, especially around race, ethnicity, and disability.
 - Noted the significant role of AI in data collection and raised concerns about issues with profiling.
 2. Craig's Update:

- Highlighted the 2023 Paul Spooner Summit hosted by the Council on Independent Living and DPC and the upcoming 2024 Summit. Further information is available at [Paul Spooner Generational Leadership](#).

3. Chris's Comments:

- Discussed ongoing work around workforce supports. Chris expressed appreciation for the House and Senate's efforts and hopes that [Chapter 257](#) will be supported in the conference committee. This bill charges the state with comparing salaries of similar positions in state systems and private non-profit residential systems.
- Chris also acknowledged the long-term need for creating career stability for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), noting challenges in building a career ladder and the importance of contributions toward retirement.
 - Mentioned that \$16.5 million in student loan repayment funds have been made available for DSPs.

4. Gyasi's Question:

- Inquired about federal funding for The Arc's recruitment efforts. An announcement regarding federal workforce funds was shared: [The Arc of Massachusetts Thanks Senators Markey and Warren for Federal Workforce Funds](#).

- Adjournment