

Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Commission Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, December 11th, 2024

Time: 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Place: Hybrid

In Person Hearing Room A2

MA State House

24 Beacon Street,

Boston, MA, 02108

Access to the recording: [link](#)

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	Oswald Mondejar – Mucho Gusto Consulting
9	Representative Mathew Muratore – House of Representatives
10	Bridget Murphy – Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin
11	Angela Ortiz – MA Health Council
12	Kathy Petkauskos – University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School
13	Carl Richardson – State House ADA Coordinator
14	Lexi Semanchik – State Treasurer’s Office
15	Rachel Stanton – State Treasurer’s Office
16	Meghan Todd – City of Framingham present
17	Christopher White – Road to Responsibility, Inc (RTR)
Members Not Present	
18	Representative Gerard Cassidy – House of Representatives
19	Nancy Garr-Colzie – Member, Worcester Disability Commission; Board Chair, Center for Living and Working
20	Reginal Marshall – Advocates
21	Felix Martinez
22	Senator Patrick O’Connor – Senate

Proceedings

Agenda:

1. Welcome, Roll Call, Approval of 9.11.24 Meeting Minutes
 - Motion to approve the minutes
 - Minutes accepted unanimously
2. Updates on Employment Initiatives and Programs from the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Acting Commissioner Sarah Peterson and Director of Community, Life, and Engagement Holly McCarthy

The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services has outlined its [Fiscal Year 2025 \(FY25\) employment priorities](#), focusing on enhancing opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Key Initiatives:

 - Strengthening Foundations:
 - o Community-Based Day Supports (CBDS): Emphasizing CBDS programs as pathways to employment by offering hands-on experiences such as volunteer work, internships, and community service projects.
 - o Pro-Employment Approach: Setting high expectations and adopting a pro-employment perspective while accommodating individuals' unique employment journeys.
 - Promoting Networks and Collaboration:
 - o Expanding Regional Employment Collaboratives: Engaging with local chambers of commerce and small business associations to broaden employment networks.
 - o Business Partnerships: Developing on-the-job training programs with companies like CVS, T.J. Maxx, and Sodexo to provide valuable work experiences and establish a workforce pipeline.
 - o Supplier Diversity Collaboration: Partnering with the Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Office to connect with certified vendors and explore new employment opportunities.
 - o Transition Support: Collaborating with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, local schools, and MassAbility to streamline employment access for individuals transitioning from school to adulthood.
 - Enhancing Training and Technology:
 - o Supportive Technology: Improving access to and proficiency in supportive technologies for individuals and staff to foster skill development and workplace independence.
 - o Stakeholder Partnerships: Working with organizations like the Institute for Community Inclusion and the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers to disseminate training

and resources, equipping providers with best practices in employment support.

For more information on DDS's employment initiatives and community engagement efforts, contact Holly McCarthy, Director of Community, Life, and Engagement, at Holly.McCarthy@mass.gov.

Additionally, the [DDS Blueprint for Success 2.0: Moving Forward Together](#) provides comprehensive insights into these strategies and is available on the DDS website.

Discussion:

- A Commissioner asked whether individuals working in stores as part of employment programs are being paid or engaging in mock customer interactions.
 - o Initially, individuals train in a mock setting before transitioning to paid employment at the university. The mock training duration is tailored to individual needs.
- A Commissioner asked if the Department of Labor has any representation on the regional collaborative employment.
 - o DDS Team will be following up with us.
- Discussion on human service workers and the role of assistive technology in supporting workplace integration: Road To Responsibility has been leveraging technology from the University of Florida to support individuals on the autism spectrum in employment settings.
- A Commissioner shared that a stronger workforce is needed supporting people with disabilities who want to be engaged in employment as well as their transportation needs. What is the latest update with DDS?
 - o DDS is actively addressing workforce retention challenges and piloting new programs to support career growth. One initiative launched last year is the Direct Support Worker (DSW) to Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program, which provides Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) with the opportunity to attend an LPN program at a college while being paid for their time in training. Participants are required to continue working one shift per week during their studies, and upon completion, they transition into LPN roles within DDS-operated systems. Last year, 18 individuals graduated, and 22 are currently enrolled.
 - o In addition to career advancement opportunities, DDS is also focused on ensuring meaningful, long-term career paths for those who choose to remain in the DSP role. Efforts are being made to improve wages, enhance training, and provide better support, making the DSP role a viable and sustainable career option.

- A Commissioner emphasized the importance of collaboration with MassAbility, noting that the sheltered work program was phased out, with the intent to transition many DDS consumers into competitive employment. This was not realized. How many DDS clients can benefit from MassAbility services to get into competitive employment?
 - o Follow-up needed with Mike Sanders, Director of Workforce Talent Development at MassAbility, for data on how many DDS consumers have made this transition.
- A Commissioner raised concerns about transportation barriers and funding mechanisms for organizations supporting employment programs. She highlighted the need for better access for immigrant communities, mothers, and people of color and the importance of how CBDS (Community-Based Day Supports) is funded.
 - o Request for Sarah Peterson and Holly McCarthy to share the Guide to Creating Inclusive Workplaces with their networks: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/a-guide-to-creating-inclusive-workplaces>.

3. Subcommittees Reports

- Workforce supports subcommittee highlights:
 - Report Period: October–November 2024
Subcommittee Members: Angela Ortiz (Chair), Rep. Khan, Andrew Levrault, Chris White
Meetings Held: One (1) on October 10, 2024
 - Meetings & Collaborations:
 - o Met with Caroline Ryan (Administration for Community Living) and Stephanie Gibbs (National Council on Aging) to discuss direct care workforce challenges and strategies.
 - o Presentation can be accessed [here](#).
 - o Identified key workforce issues, including high turnover (42.8%–64.8%), demographic disparities (67% people of color, 40% low-income), and service impacts (referrals turned away increased from 77% to 83% in one year).
 - o Explored workforce strategies such as recruitment initiatives, professional development programs, financial incentives, and cross-sector collaboration.
 - Action Items:
 - o Follow up on Spring 2025 workforce initiatives in Massachusetts.
 - o Discuss strategies for supporting direct care professionals.
 - o Engage with state and federal representatives on housing, transportation, and workforce diversity challenges.
 - o Invite the Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA) to present workforce survey findings.

- Establish quarterly meetings with Dr. Patricia Yu (EOHHS) on workforce solutions.
 - Ongoing Projects & FY25 Goals:
 - Strengthen cross-sector stakeholder collaboration to address workforce shortages.
 - Analyze existing workforce data to identify priority action areas and guide improvement initiatives.
 - Subcommittee Updates:
 - Angela Ortiz stepping down as Chair; nominates Andrew Levrault as new Chair.
 - Seeking 1–2 additional Commission members to join the subcommittee.
 - Upcoming Meetings from 11am to 12pm
 - 1/16/25
 - 2/13/25
 - 4/17/25
 - 5/15/25
 - 8/28/25
 - 11/13/25
- Legislative and Budget subcommittee highlights:
 - Report Period: November 2024
Subcommittee Members: Charles Carr, Chris White, Meghan Todd, Carl Richardson
Meetings Held: One (1) on November 14, 2024
 - Key Updates:
 - The committee discussed realigning its goals to avoid endorsing specific budget or legislative priorities due to potential conflicts of interest as state employees.
 - Members explored three potential focus areas: healthcare inequity, housing, and transportation. A final decision on priorities will be voted on at the December 11 Commission meeting.
 - Ann Lynch from the Attorney General’s Office attended and is exploring the possibility of joining the committee.
 - Key next steps include finalizing the subcommittee's focus areas, recruiting new members, and renaming the committee.
 - Upcoming Meetings once subcommittee is renamed (11am to 12pm)
 - January 27, 2025
 - February 24, 2025
 - April 28, 2025
 - May 19, 2025
 - August 25, 2025
 - November 17, 2025
- Disability Employment subcommittee highlights:

- Report Period: September–December 2024
Subcommittee Members: Kathy Petkauskos, Christopher White, Mathew Muratore, Oz Mondejar, Carl Richardson, Gyasi Burks-Abbott, Rachel Stanton
Meetings Held: One (1) on November 18, 2024
- Key Updates:
 - Video Project: A short video featuring three employers (MicroTek, Plymouth YMCA, and Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston) successfully hiring people with disabilities was launched on October 23, 2024, during National Disability Employment Awareness Month.
 - The video has been widely shared with the business community through chambers of commerce and business associations.
 - A new resource page, [*A Guide to Creating Inclusive Workplaces*](#), was added to the Commission’s website, providing employers with tools on talent acquisition, compliance, training, tax incentives, and DEI initiatives.
- Upcoming Activities:
 - Meeting on January 27, 2025, to transition leadership from outgoing Chair Kathy Petkauskos to newly nominated Co-Chairs Rachel Stanton and Gyasi Burks-Abbott.
 - Hosting MassAbility, Commonwealth Corp. Department of Economic Research, and Executive Office of Labor to discuss benefit cliff updates in February.
 - Discussion of future projects and strategic planning for 2025.
- Upcoming Meetings from 12pm to 1pm
 - January 27, 2025
 - February 24, 2025
 - April 28, 2025
 - May 19, 2025
 - August 25, 2025
 - November 17, 2025

4. Identifying a Next Pillar of Focus for the Commission Discussion Summary:

- The Commission engaged in a discussion on potential areas of focus for its next pillar, emphasizing health equity and community living as central themes. Members highlighted ongoing collaborations with the Health Equity Compact and the Healey/Driscoll administration, suggesting that long-term services and supports should be integrated into the pillar’s framework to reinforce the importance of independent community living.
- There was broad support for this direction, with recognition that while the Commission cannot endorse specific legislation, it can shape its

focus around impactful topics. Transportation access, particularly for individuals with visual disabilities, was identified as a key issue, along with the broader role of quality healthcare as a foundation for economic stability, education, and housing.

- The discussion also underscored the evolving landscape of health equity, including federal policy shifts, social determinants of health, and the need to advocate for the value of disabled lives within healthcare systems. The upcoming transition in the One Care system was flagged as a significant development, and the intersection of health equity with employment and systemic barriers was highlighted as a priority moving forward.

- Next Steps:

- Rename the Legislative and Budget subcommittee to Long-Term Services and Supports and Health Equity Subcommittee to reflect its expanded scope.
- Ensure alignment and coordination between LTSS, workforce, and other subcommittees to avoid redundancy and maximize impact.
- Schedule a meeting between subcommittee chairs and the executive board to discuss integration and collaboration.
- Vote to formalize Health Equity and LTSS as the next Commission pillar and develop the subcommittee's focus areas accordingly.

5. 2025 Meeting Dates and New Time (11am to 12:30pm)

- March 12
- June 11
- September 10
- November 5 11-12 (tentative) annual report review
- December 10

6. Adjournment