

MASSACHUSETTS



COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

2026 National Disability Employment Awareness Month Celebration



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Great Hall of Flags | Massachusetts State House

Wednesday, October 7, 2026

Letter from the Chair

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Massachusetts State House and thank you for joining us as we celebrate this year's National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

We are honored to welcome Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll as this year's keynote speaker. We are pleased to have her join us as we recognize the people and organizations advancing disability inclusion and reaffirm our shared commitment to a Commonwealth where people with disabilities have equitable opportunities to work, lead, participate, and thrive.

We are also grateful for the continued leadership of Speaker Ron Mariano and Senate President Karen Spilka and for their commitment to advancing equity, inclusion, and opportunity for people with disabilities across the Commonwealth.



National Disability Employment Awareness Month gives us an opportunity to celebrate how far we have come, recognize the people who are leading the way, and be clear about the work that still needs to be done. Employment is about so much more than a job. It is about opportunity, independence, belonging, and having the chance to contribute your talents and be valued for what you bring to the workplace and your community.

This year, we are proud to recognize Senator Joan Lovely and Representative Sean Garballey for their leadership in the Legislature. We will also honor The Langham Boston and the Disability Policy Consortium in the small-to-mid-size employer category, and Eastern Bank in the large employer category, for their commitment to disability employment and inclusion. We will also recognize Micah Fleisig as our Employment Support Champion, honoring his work supporting people with disabilities in employment and the important role employment support professionals play in helping people access and succeed in the workplace.

We are also looking ahead. Artificial intelligence is changing the way we work, hire, communicate, and access information, and people with disabilities need to be part of that conversation. Our afternoon panel, Artificial Intelligence, Disability, and the Future of Work, will bring together different perspectives to talk about the opportunities AI may create, the barriers we need to be mindful of, and what it will take to make sure accessibility and disability inclusion are considered from the beginning, not after decisions have already been made.

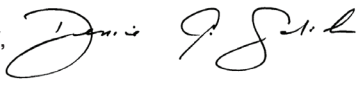
Our work as a Commission is grounded in three core functions: Convene, Collaborate, and Communicate. Over the past year, we have worked to put those words into practice. Through our Meeting the Moment community conversations and our work with people with disabilities, families, advocates, employers, state agencies, providers, and community partners, we have continued to bring people together, build partnerships, and make sure that what we hear from communities across Massachusetts helps inform our work.

That same spirit is at the heart of today's celebration. There are so many people in this room and joining us virtually who are doing this work every day, often in very different ways. Bringing all of those voices together is what makes this day so meaningful.

I want to thank our Commissioners and Advisory Council members, our partners and community organizations, and everyone who has given their time, expertise, and lived experience to the Commission. And to everyone joining us today, thank you for showing up, for staying engaged, and for the work you do in your own communities.

We have much to celebrate, and we also know there is more to do. I hope we leave today with new connections, new ideas, and a renewed commitment to convene, collaborate, and communicate as we continue working toward a Commonwealth where people with disabilities have every opportunity to work, lead, participate, and thrive.

Thank you for being part of this day.

Sincerely, 
Denise Garlick
Commission Chair

Welcome to the 2026 National Disability Employment Awareness Month Celebration

Thank you for joining the Massachusetts Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities as we celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Today’s event recognizes individuals with disabilities, employers, legislative leaders, direct support professionals, and community partners who are advancing disability inclusion across the Commonwealth. It is also an opportunity to learn from one another, celebrate progress, and continue working toward a future where people with disabilities have equitable opportunities to succeed in every workplace and every community.

About the Commission

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is an independent permanent state agency established by Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020, which added Section 74 to Chapter 3 of the Massachusetts General Laws. The Commission’s legislative mandate is to advance the cause of all persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth. Its statutory responsibilities include:

- i. Studying, reviewing, advising, and reporting on:
 - A. Disparities across service or geographic areas concerning the range of available options within state disability services;
 - B. The status of transportation for persons with disabilities, including access to employment opportunities;
 - C. The effect of public assistance for persons with disabilities as it pertains to earning limits and eligibility for subsidies for food, housing, child care, and other benefits;
 - D. Establishing school-to-work activities for transition-aged youth with disabilities that build a bridge to self-sufficiency and engage school supports, family members, and employers;
 - E. The status of the strategic plan to make the Commonwealth a model employer by increasing the number of people with disabilities employed by the executive branch;
 - F. Enhanced enforcement of state requirements that promote diversity in state government employment; and
 - G. The number of persons with disabilities who apply for state disability services and are unsuccessful in receiving services.
- ii. Facilitating and promoting public awareness to encourage inclusion of persons with disabilities as employees and vendors in both the public and private sectors, including underrepresented business sectors of all sizes.
- iii. Assessing programs and practices in all state agencies as they affect persons with disabilities, as the Commission deems necessary and appropriate.
- iv. Advising executive and legislative bodies regarding the impact of proposed legislation on persons with disabilities.

v. Promoting and facilitating collaboration among local disability commissions, disability rights advocacy organizations, and disability employment service providers.

The commission shall annually, not later than October 31, 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.

The Commission's three standing subcommittees are:

- **Disability Employment Subcommittee** – Focuses on increasing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in both state government and the private sector. This includes reviewing workforce data, learning from agency initiatives, and exploring strategies that promote inclusive hiring, retention, and advancement.
- **Workforce Supports Subcommittee** – Examines the challenges affecting the human services and direct care workforce that supports people with disabilities. The subcommittee reviews workforce trends, hears from providers and agencies, and identifies issues and opportunities that affect workforce stability.
- **Long-Term Services & Supports (LTSS) and Health Equity Subcommittee** – Assesses how policies, funding decisions, and health equity efforts shape the availability and quality of long-term services and supports for people with disabilities. The subcommittee focuses on reviewing data, hearing from experts, and facilitating conversations that highlight service gaps and promising approaches.

Key Initiatives

Beyond its standing subcommittees, the Commission carries out several statewide initiatives to engage the disability community, elevate priorities, and advance its legislative mandate.

Meeting the Moment

The Commission's statewide community engagement series brings together people with disabilities, caregivers, advocates, providers, state agencies, legislators, and community partners to hear directly from communities across Massachusetts about the issues affecting their lives. These conversations help inform the Commission's priorities, recommendations, and ongoing work.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Every other year, the Commission hosts a statewide National Disability Employment Awareness Month celebration to recognize disability-inclusive employers, employees with disabilities, direct support professionals, and legislative leaders and to bring attention to opportunities and challenges in disability employment.

Annual Report and Legislative Priorities

Each year, the Commission reports on its activities, findings, and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature. Informed by community engagement, subcommittee work, data, and collaboration with state agencies and partners, the Commission identifies policy and legislative priorities aimed at improving the lives of people with disabilities across the Commonwealth.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Commission, our current priorities and initiatives, upcoming meetings and events, reports, and ways to stay engaged.



Commission Membership

The Commission is guided by the leadership and expertise of the following members, who bring diverse perspectives and a shared commitment to advancing its mission:

Gyasi Burks-Abbott

Commission Elected Disability Employment
Subcommittee Co-Chair
Self-Advocate, Faculty, LEND Program, Boston
Children's Hospital and UMass Boston's Institute for
Community Inclusion
Appointed by the Governor

Charles Carr

Commission Elected Long Term Services and
Supports and Health Equity Subcommittee Co-Chair
Legislative Liaison for the Disability Policy
Consortium
Appointed by Disability Policy Consortium

The Honorable Denise Garlick

Commission Elected Chair
Appointed by the Governor

Nancy Garr-Colzie

Member & Board Chair
Your Access Advocates and Massachusetts
Statewide Independent Living Council
Appointed by the Governor

Victoria Gill

Director of Learning and Development, Disabled
Persons Protection Commission
*Appointed by Disabled Persons Protection
Commission*

Craig Hall

Executive Director
Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council
*Appointed by Massachusetts Developmental
Disabilities Council*

Senator Vanna Howard

State Senator Massachusetts Senate
Appointed by the Speaker of the House

Rachel Kaprielian

Commission Elected Workforce Supports
Subcommittee Co-Chair
Chief Executive Officer, Triangle, Inc.
Appointed by the Governor

Representative Jay Livingstone

State Representative
Massachusetts House of Representatives
Appointed by the Speaker of the House

Ann Lynch

Assistant Attorney General, Disability Rights
Coordinator, Massachusetts Attorney General's
Office
Appointed by the Attorney General's Office

Representative John Marsi

State Representative, Massachusetts House of
Representatives
Appointed by the House Minority Leader

Regina Marshall

Chief Executive Officer, Advocates
Appointed by the Senate President

Oswald Mondeja

Commission Elected Clerk
President, Mucho Gusto Consulting
Appointed by the Governor

Bridget Murphy

Project Manager, Office of the Secretary of the
Commonwealth, William Francis Galvin
Appointed by the State Secretary

Sengtor Patrick O'Connor

State Senator, Massachusetts Senate
Appointed by the Senate Minority Leader

Kathy Petkauskos

Executive Director, Workplace Equity and Inclusion,
Work Without Limits, ForHealth Consulting,
University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School
*Appointed by the University of Massachusetts
Chan Medical School*

Carl Richardson

Commission Elected Long Term Services and
Supports and Health Equity Subcommittee Co-
Chair and Treasurer
ADA Coordinator/504 Diversity Officer,
Massachusetts State House
Appointed by the Senate President

Representative Lindsay Sabadosa

State Representative, Massachusetts House of Representatives
Appointed by the Speaker of the House

Leo Sarkissian

Commission Elected Workforce Supports
Subcommittee Co-Chair
The Arc of Massachusetts
Appointed by the Governor

Commission Membership

Lexi Semanchik

HR Marketing & Communications Specialist, State
Treasurer and Receiver General's Office
Treasurer's Office Designee #2

Rachel Stanton

Commission Elected Disability Employment
Subcommittee Co-Chair
Investor Relations & Communications Designer,
Clean Water Trust | Debt Management
Treasurer's Office Designee

Meghan Todd

Grants Manager, City of Framingham
Appointed by the Senate President

Christopher White

Commission Elected Vice-Chair
President/CEO, Road to Responsibility, Inc.
*Appointed by the Association of Developmental
Disabilities Providers, Inc.*

COMMISSIONERS EMERITI

Representative Gerard Cassidy

Carla Kath

Representative Kay Khan

Andrew Levrault

Felix Martinez

Representative Mathew Muratore

Angela Ortiz

Nancy Rumbolt-Trzcinski

Dan Shannon

Paul W. Spooner

Kerry Thompson

Melinda Troy

Liz Zelnick

Learn more about each Commissioner by scanning the QR code



Advisory Council Membership

The Advisory Council of the Massachusetts Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is composed of volunteer leaders, subject-matter experts, and self-advocates from across key sectors that shape access, equity, and inclusion for persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth. Members are selected by the Commission based on lived experience, professional expertise, and demonstrated leadership in disability inclusion and serve in a non-voting, advisory capacity to provide strategic guidance, sector-specific insight, and collaborative support to advance the Commission's statewide priorities.

Shakira Alvarez

Program Coordinator, TRIO Student Support Services Program

Joe R. Buizon

Director, Programs and Services, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

Kristin Britton

Director of Disability Access, Department of Transitional Assistance

Erika Burrows

Chief Executive Officer, The Center of Hope Foundation

Lauren Baczewski

Director of Research & Education, Neurodiversity Center for Excellence, Curry College

Nora Bent

Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Partnerships, The Arc of Massachusetts

Helen Corbett

Community Advisor

Steven Croteau

Director, Veterans Bonus Division, Office of the Massachusetts State Treasurer

Becky Curran

Senior Director, Stakeholder Engagement, Disability:IN

David Estrada

SRN Research and DEIA Disability Program Manager, Spaulding New England Regional Spinal Cord Injury Center

Collin Fedor

Deputy Chief of Staff, MassHealth, Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Elyse Forbush

Director of Employment and Community Development, Run The Gamut

Jenna Guilbeault

Community Outreach Officer, Lowell Five Bank

Manny Marcelino Guerra

Co-Founder/Manager, Wheels On the Bus Transportation LLC

Nicole Godaire

Chief Executive Officer, Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts

Lynn Gonsalves

Executive Director, Partners for Youth with Disabilities

Ryan Jackson

Communications Coordinator, Zoo New England

Keith Jones

Self Advocate

Raquel Quezada

*Founder and CEO, Fundación Cambiando el Mundo de Personas con Discapacidad (CEMDPCD)
Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council Chair*

Parker Koppelman

Chief Risk Officer, Liberty Mutual Insurance

Andrew Levrault

Deputy General Counsel, MA Disabled Persons Protection Commission

Barbara L'Italien

Executive Director, Disability Law Center

Dr. Linda Long Bellil

Assistant Professor, Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, Commonwealth Medicine, University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School

Allan Motenko

Executive Director, Massachusetts Office on Disability

Jody Nash

Board of Directors, Cardinal Cushing Centers

Nassira Nicola

Language Access Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Advisory Council Membership

- Sarah Peterson**
Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services

- Ive Peña Gonzalez**
Chief Engagement Officer, Eastern Bank

- Richard Rodriguez**
Attorney, Law Office of Richard Rodriguez

- Cambria Russell, Ph.D.**
Associate Executive Director, Federation for Children with Special Needs

- Kay Schoucair**
Senior Organizer & Advocacy Communications Coordinator, Boston Center for Independent Living

- Dr. Opeoluwa Sotonwa**
Commissioner, Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- Laura Stout**
Director of Contract Operations, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

- Megan Sullivan**
Director of Inclusive Pedagogy, Boston University

- Maura Sullivan**
Chief Executive Director, The Arc of Massachusetts

- Olivia Thompson**
Administrative Associate, UU Wellesley Hills

- Sonja Unica**
Employee Experience Liaison, Merck

- Erin Weinman**
Executive Vice President, MicroTek, Inc.

- Joannah Whitney**
Community Consultant, Greenfield, MA

- Toni Wolf**
Commissioner, MassAbility





WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7 • 2026 EVENT SCHEDULE

Great Hall Of Flags, Massachusetts State House

11:30AM- 1:00PM

2026 NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Honorable Denise Garlick

Commission Chair and Emcee

Keynote Address

The Honorable Kim Driscoll

Lieutenant Governor

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Remarks

Legislative Recognition

Presented by:

Senator Robyn Kennedy

Representative Jay Livingstone

Senator Joan Lovely

Senate Legislative Honoree

Remarks

Representative Sean Garballey

House Legislative Honoree

Remarks

Employer Recognition

Presented by: Advisory Council Member Elyse Forbush

Commissioner Rachel Kaprielian

Commissioner Oswald Mondejar

The Langham Boston

Small-to-Mid-Size Organization Honoree

Remarks by: Robin White, Director of People & Culture

Michele Grosso, Managing Director

Davey Farina, Lobby Greeter

Disability Policy Consortium

Small-to-Mid-Size Organization Honoree

Remarks by: Kimberly Bradshaw, Director of Human Resources

Maggie Sheets, Research Coordinator

Eastern Bank

Large Organization Honoree

Remarks by: Kathleen Henry, General Counsel and Chief Human Resources Officer

Jessica Rodriguez, Business Systems Analyst and Diverse Abilities Group ERG Co-Chair

Employment Support Champion

Presented by Commissioner Chris White

Micah Fleisig, JVS Boston

Employment Support Champion Honoree

Remarks

Closing Remarks

The Honorable Denise Garlick

Commission Chair

AFTERNOON PANEL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, DISABILITY, AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2026 | 2–3:30 PM
ROOM 428, MASSACHUSETTS STATE HOUSE + ZOOM

MASSACHUSETTS

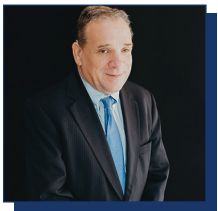


COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

About the Panel

Artificial intelligence is changing the way we work, communicate, access information, and make decisions. This panel will explore how AI is shaping employment for people with disabilities, including the opportunities it may create, accessibility and inclusion considerations, and the questions employers and policymakers should consider as these technologies continue to evolve.

Moderators



Carl Richardson

ADA Coordinator/504 Diversity Officer, Massachusetts State House
Commissioner, Massachusetts Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Carl Richardson identifies as DeafBlind and serves as the ADA Coordinator/504/Diversity Officer for the Massachusetts State House. In this role, Carl works with the Governor and Executive Branch, as well as members of the Legislature and leadership from state agencies, to serve individuals with disabilities across the Commonwealth and help ensure that the State House is an accessible, inclusive, and welcoming environment.

Carl also serves as Treasurer for the Mayor's Office for the City of Boston Disability Commission, Treasurer for the Massachusetts Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, President of Guide Dog Users of Massachusetts, and Co-Chair of the Audio Description Project for the American Council of the Blind.



Rachel Stanton

Rachel Stanton is the Investor Relations and Communications Graphic Designer for the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust and Debt Management at the Office of the State Treasurer and Receiver General. Rachel is responsible for the graphic design, marketing, social media, and investor relations for both departments. Her passion for accessibility and transparency in the public sector drives her to educate and implement best practices when designing and publishing content. Rachel also serves as a Commissioner on the Massachusetts Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and previously served as Co-Chair of the Commission's Disability Employment Subcommittee.

Panelists

Ashley Bloom

Chief Accessibility Officer
Massachusetts Executive Office of Technology Services and Security

Ashley Bloom has been involved in the field of accessibility both personally and professionally for over 20 years. Her past experience includes developing and leading accessibility programs and strategy in higher education and corporate environments. Ashley is passionate about accessibility in both digital and physical spaces. She partners with individuals and teams across the Commonwealth to build accessibility into digital processes and purchases and provides accessibility guidance and strategy to support a proactive approach to accessible and equitable content.

AFTERNOON PANEL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, DISABILITY, AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2026 | 2-3:30 PM
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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
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Alexandra DeVoe

Lead Accessibility Engineer

Massachusetts Executive Office of Technology Services and Security

Alexandra DeVoe is a seasoned accessibility engineer with experience creating accessible design systems and web accessibility training. She serves as the Lead Accessibility Engineer on the Accessibility Center for Consulting, Education and Support Services (ACCESS) team at the Massachusetts Executive Office of Technology Services and Security.

She is an expert in developing requirements for product teams, including accessible code examples, providing guidance for designers, and conducting code reviews for developers. Throughout her 20-year career as a web designer, front-end engineer, and accessibility specialist, Alexandra has worked on website remediation and accessibility audits. She specializes in responsive web development for desktop, tablet, and mobile and accessibility for all users.



Rania Kelly, MPA, M.Arch.

President, MassFamilies

Director of Family Engagement, Perkins School for the Blind
LEND Fellow

Rania Kelly is President of MassFamilies, Director of Family Engagement at Perkins School for the Blind, and a LEND Fellow. She recently developed an AI prototype to help family caregivers capture, organize, and share caregiving knowledge. Her interests in AI include employment, caregiving, accessibility, autonomy, and inclusive design. Her work focuses on disability systems and community inclusion and is informed by her experience as a family caregiver to her son with profound autism.



Adriana Mallozzi

CEO of REquipment, Inc.

Adriana Mallozzi is the CEO of REquipment, Inc., a Massachusetts nonprofit that coordinates the statewide durable medical equipment and assistive technology reuse program. She is also a disability advocate, assistive tech entrepreneur, and founder of Puffin Innovations, which developed hands-free technology that incorporates artificial intelligence and machine learning to adapt to each user. Her work focuses on advancing accessibility, independence, and meaningful inclusion for people with disabilities. As a woman with cerebral palsy who uses a power wheelchair and assistive technology daily, Adriana brings both lived and professional experience to conversations about disability, technology, employment,

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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
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accessibility, and inclusive innovation.

Greg Mazzeo, PsyD

Leadership and Organizational Psychologist
Founder, Nourishment Consulting

Greg Mazzeo is a leadership and organizational psychologist, TEDx speaker, podcast guest, and founder of Nourishment Consulting, where he is dedicated to creating conditions for healthy, human-centered leadership and organizational functioning. He holds a Doctorate in Leadership Psychology from William James College and has a background spanning restaurant leadership, human resources practice, and teaching.

His research and TEDx talk examine how inclusive language and symbols build psychological safety, connection, and workplace belonging. Greg provides leaders with actionable, science-backed strategies designed to create excellence without exhaustion and performance without burnout. As AI and emerging technologies reshape the future of the workforce, he advocates for designing accessible environments that prioritize human dignity and safety in the modern workplace.



Sheila Phicil

Founder/CEO, Phicil-itate Change LLC

Sheila Phicil is a Social Change Futurist™ with nearly 20 years in healthcare innovation. She founded Phicil-itate Change, a company that helps hospitals, startups, and investors build AI tools that put the most vulnerable people first. She led innovation at three major hospitals: Brigham and Women's Hospital, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, and Boston Medical Center, where she directed innovation for the Health Equity Accelerator.

Sheila created SEEDS Innovation™, a framework for making smart, responsible AI decisions. She also founded Listen Phirst™, a platform that turns patient stories into real research data, while keeping people in control of their own data and paid fairly for it.

Sheila is a first-generation Haitian American who started her first nonprofit at 14. She holds two master's degrees from Boston University and the PMP and FACHE certifications. She speaks widely on healthcare and AI and writes for journals like JAMA Oncology. Her upcoming book, *Remembering How to Care*, explores what it means to care for people in the age of AI.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the panel and access additional information.



2026 LEGISLATIVE RECOGNITION HONOREES



Senator Joan Lovely

Senator Joan Lovely is serving her seventh term as State Senator for the Second Essex District, representing Beverly, Danvers, Peabody, and Salem since 2013. A proud graduate of Salem State University and a Salem resident, Lovely has built a career grounded in public service and community engagement. She returned to higher education after raising her family and earned her undergraduate degree before going on to receive a juris doctorate from the Massachusetts School of Law. Lovely began her public service on the Salem City Council in 1997, where she served for 15 years, including terms as Council President and Acting Mayor. Her leadership extended to advocacy for seniors and individuals with disabilities, reflecting her commitment to inclusive local governance. In the Massachusetts Senate, she serves as Assistant Majority Leader and Chair of the Senate and Joint Committees on Rules, and also serves as Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Emergency Preparedness and Management. She is actively engaged in numerous caucuses and policy areas, including climate change, food systems, and women's leadership. Lovely's experience as a nontraditional student at Salem State informs her strong support for accessible, community-based higher education and workforce development.



Introduced by Senator Robyn Kennedy

Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

Senator Robyn Kennedy, a lifelong resident of Worcester, serves as the State Senator for the First Worcester District. She is a dedicated champion of the care economy, focusing on strengthening services from childcare to elder care, investing in the workforce, improving regional public transportation, and addressing racial and health inequities.

Before her election, Senator Kennedy served as the Chief Operating Officer at the YWCA Central Massachusetts, where she advocated for women, children, and marginalized communities. Her public service also includes roles as Deputy Chief of Staff to former Lt. Governor Tim Murray and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Children, Youth, and Families at the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

Senator Kennedy remains dedicated to fostering a more equitable and prosperous future for Worcester and the broader Commonwealth, leveraging her experience and passion to drive meaningful change.



Representative Sean Garballey

Sean Garballey is the State Representative for the 23rd Middlesex District, which includes the communities of Arlington and Medford. First elected in 2008, Representative Garballey currently serves as the House Chairperson for the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development.

Representative Garballey has been successful in passing major pieces of legislation across many different sectors. A strong advocate and champion of those with intellectual disabilities and autism, Representative Garballey has been able to pass multiple bills to support underrepresented groups in the Legislature – these bills include health insurance coverage for children with Down Syndrome, creating a commission to study and report on the history of state institutions, removing the R-word from Massachusetts General Laws, opening the records of state institutions to the public 75 years after their creation, allowing students with intellectual disabilities and/or autism the opportunity to attend public colleges and universities, and the Blue envelope Program to facilitate better communication between police and those on the autism spectrum.

Representative Garballey has also been instrumental in passing legislation such as health insurance coverage for hearing aids for children, health insurance coverage for those living with multiple sclerosis, ensuring all adoptees born in the Commonwealth are able to access their original birth certificates, protections for social workers in the workplace, banning the sale of tobacco products at pharmacies throughout the Commonwealth, online voter registration, prohibiting the practice of “meal debt shaming” in schools, COVID-19 Emergency Paid Sick Leave, and establishing Restorative Justice in Massachusetts.



Introduced by Representative Jay Livingstone

House Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

Jay Livingstone is the State Representative for the 8th Suffolk District in the Massachusetts House of Representatives – including parts of Beacon Hill, Back Bay, West End, and The Fenway. He has served in this position since 2013. Jay proudly serves as the House Chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities since 2023.

Since becoming the Chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, Jay’s work led the enactment of four laws from the Committee. Additionally, Jay oversaw legislation to ensure children in foster care receive their Disability and SSI benefits, rather than returning it to the State’s General Fund.

In addition, after pending for 22 years, a bill became law this summer that removed out-of-date and offensive terms related to persons with disabilities. Terms would be amended with “person first” language and replaced with more current, respectful terminology, such as “person with a disability.” A bill that Jay filed enhancing child welfare protections and strengthening oversight, transparency, and accountability within the Commonwealth’s child welfare system was signed into law in August.

Raised in North Attleboro, MA, Jay graduated from the University of Connecticut, and then George Washington University Law School. Jay and his wife, Julie, live in the Back Bay with their two sons.

THE LANGHAM

BOSTON

Over the past 5 years The Langham Hotel Boston has worked closely with organizations such as Partners for Youth with Disabilities (PYD) and Run the Gamut (RTG). We've collaborated with these groups by inviting their students to our Hotel, given tours of the Hotel, provided Lunch & Learn Workshops to train students on interviewing skills and resume writing, in hopes that one day they may consider working in the hospitality field.

We've participated in PYD's Summer Youth Leadership Forum at Emerson College, moderated panel discussions at PYD's Brunch & Build event to promote dismantling barriers and championing the inclusion of youth with disabilities and we've donated furniture to RTG to assist them in creating a mock hotel room for their students to learn to train in. The most exciting part of collaborating with these organizations is, we recently created the position of Lobby Greeter and we hired a student from RTG! And that's a win/win for everyone!

Disability Inclusion Matters!



2026 SMALL TO MID-SIZE ORGANIZATION HONOREE

The Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) is a Massachusetts-based disability rights and advocacy organization. We are led by and for the disability community, with over 75% of our staff identifying as having a disability. DPC's mission is to ensure that the disability community plays a leading role in making decisions that affect our lives. We do this through amplifying the voices, perspectives, and expertise of people with diverse disabilities in Massachusetts and beyond. Our core programs include grassroots advocacy, community-based participatory research, disability-led training & consulting, and healthcare rights and benefits navigation for all MassHealth members.



Our vision is a Commonwealth, country, and world that prioritizes disability justice and secures independence, inclusion, and empowerment for all. DPC's credo, "About Us, By Us," is an extension of the disability rights slogan "Nothing About Us Without Us" that came into popularity in the 1990s. "Nothing About Us Without Us" is a call for disabled people to be part of making decisions that impact our lives, as well as the creation of services that are meant for us. "About Us, By Us" asserts that such decisions should center the disability community and be led by disabled people.

As an organization that proudly employs mostly people with disabilities, creating an inclusive environment is our top priority. We strive to surpass ADA compliance and move towards complete and intentional inclusion that ensures all employees' needs are fully met. DPC's workplace norms include flexible work location and hours for all employees and physically accessible work and event spaces. Additionally, our baseline communication access includes ASL interpreters and Communications Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning and screen-reader compatible materials for all internal and external engagements. Furthermore, as part of the onboarding process, every new employee participates in a series of disability history and inclusion trainings that cover the history of the disability justice movement and the specific needs of different disability groups. For employees with disabilities, these trainings allow them to share their own lived experiences and connect with others who have similar needs as they do. All employees gain a better understanding of the evolution of disability advocacy and how to better support their peers with diverse disabilities, including communication norms and appropriate language to use when discussing disability in the workplace. Lastly, DPC's commitment to disability inclusion is clear in our supervisor/employee relationships. Onboarding and regular supervisory check-ins always include a discussion of accommodations to ensure that the employee's needs are met. The Executive Director and HR Director provide supervisors with the resources to have these ongoing conversations and provide necessary supports. Our internal operations also allow us to effectively engage vendors, partners, and individuals with disabilities as well. We apply all communication and access norms to external engagements, making DPC an excellent partner to all members of the disability community.

The Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) is a disability rights and advocacy organization that is led by and for the disability community – over 75% of our staff and board identify as disabled. As a proud employer of people with disabilities, we strive to surpass ADA compliance and move towards complete and intentional inclusion that ensures all employees feel supported and empowered to grow in their careers.



Eastern Bank

JOIN US FOR GOOD®

Eastern Bank, Greater Boston's leading local bank, recognizes the importance of belonging in the workplace, and is committed to building a workplace where every colleague has the opportunity to contribute fully and grow their career. Our employee benefits are designed to be inclusive, accessible and reflective of a range of both employee and caregiver needs and experiences. Our Diverse Abilities Group, Eastern's employee-led, executive-sponsored ERG, champions disability inclusion through education, awareness, engagement, and advocacy, cultivating a workplace where employees, caregivers, and allies feel valued and supported. Eastern has also been named a World's Top Disability Inclusive Business on the Disability Index® for three consecutive years, including 2026.

Eastern Bank is committed to fostering inclusivity and a supportive work environment for all employees, including those with disabilities, neurodiversity, and mental health challenges,” said Kathy Henry, Executive Vice President, General Counsel and Chief Human Resources Officer of Eastern Bank. “Colleagues with disabilities drive meaningful impact for our customers and the communities we serve, and make Eastern stronger every day. We’re grateful to the Massachusetts Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities for their recognition and will keep building a workplace where everyone can contribute their best work.”



Pete Orrall (far left) and Jessica Rodriguez (second from right), Co-Chairs of Eastern Bank's Diverse Abilities Group, Eastern's employee-led, executive-sponsored ERG, are shown with Executive Sponsor Kathy Henry (second from left), who is Executive Vice President, General Counsel and Chief Human Resources Officer of Eastern Bank, and Eastern Bank Executive Chair and Chair of the Board of Directors Bob Rivers (far right) at an event for employees, customers and community partners offering a real-life look at entrepreneur and Eastern Bank customer Collette Divitto, who is neurodiverse, and her inspiring journey of creating her wildly successful small business, Collettoy's Cookies, as well as jobs and inspiration for people with disabilities. Photo Credit: Nicole Loeb Photography



Eastern Bank Business Bankers Jose Abreu (on the left) and Abby Nguyen-Burke (on the right) with entrepreneur and Eastern Bank customer Collette Divitto (in the middle), who is neurodiverse, at her wildly successful small business, Collettoy's Cookies, which also creates jobs and inspiration for people with disabilities. Photo Credit: Greg Cooper Photography

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT CHAMPION: MICAH FLEISIG

Micah Fleisig is a Senior Manager in Disability Services at JVS in Boston. JVS Boston is a non-profit workforce development agency that empowers individuals from diverse communities to find employment and build careers, and partners with employers to hire, develop, and retain productive workforces. Micah holds a Master's in Education (MEd) and has spent more than twenty-five years supporting individuals with disabilities in a variety of settings. After stints as a teacher and an assistant teacher, a residential counselor in a group home, a tutor, an administrator at his beloved summer camp (Avoda), a barista at Starbucks, and even a daycare provider, Micah found JVS — where he has been proud to work for the past fifteen years. As a person with a disability who spent years searching for his own place in the “work world,” Micah has experienced the transformative power of employment firsthand. Every day, Micah feels fortunate to be part of JVS's Disability Services team — a group of 18 colleagues who work tirelessly to help transition-aged youth earn paid jobs before they leave high school and to help adults build lasting careers. Micah's work at JVS is shaped by everything he has learned as an educator, colleague, and a person with a disability, and his work is grounded in one single conviction: that meaningful employment changes lives. Micah ranks his work in JVS's Disability Services department right up there with his family as one of the great privileges and gifts of his life.

“I am deeply grateful to be recognized by the Massachusetts Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and receiving this honor during National Disability Employment Month makes it all the more meaningful. It feels strange to receive this for work I do alongside a remarkable community — my colleagues at JVS Boston and so many partners beyond it. This work has given me far more than I could ever give back.”



CELEBRATING EMPLOYERS ADVANCING DISABILITY INCLUSION

The Massachusetts Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities sincerely thanks every organization that submitted a nomination for the 2026 National Disability Employment Awareness Month Employer Recognition Awards.

Each organization is helping create more inclusive workplaces where people with disabilities can contribute, grow, and succeed. Your commitment to accessibility, inclusion, and opportunity is helping strengthen our workforce and communities across the Commonwealth.

2026 Participating Employers



MEETING THE MOMENT:

BRINGING THE COMMISSION TO COMMUNITIES ACROSS MASSACHUSETTS

MASSACHUSETTS



COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Meeting the Moment is the Commission's statewide community engagement initiative, created to bring the Commission directly into communities across the Commonwealth and hear from people with disabilities about the issues that matter most to them.

Through community conversations and resource fairs, Meeting the Moment brings together people with disabilities, caregivers, advocates, service providers, state agencies, legislators, local organizations, and community partners to share experiences, identify needs, connect with resources, and help inform the Commission's work and priorities.

Reaching Communities Across the Commonwealth

Greater Boston | Fall 2025

The Commission launched Meeting the Moment by bringing community members, state agencies, advocates, and partners together to share experiences and discuss priorities affecting people with disabilities.

Northeastern Massachusetts | Spring 2026

In partnership with MassAbility, the Commission continued the series with a community conversation and resource fair, creating opportunities for people with disabilities to speak directly with the Commission and connect with organizations and resources.

Western Massachusetts | Summer 2026

Meeting the Moment expanded to Western Massachusetts with a hybrid community conversation and in-person resource fair. Community members shared experiences and priorities related to issues including transportation, employment, housing, health care, and long-term services and supports.

Continuing Across Massachusetts

The Commission will continue bringing Meeting the Moment to communities across the Commonwealth to ensure that lived experiences and local priorities help inform its statewide work.

Next: South Shore | Fall 2026



Want to hear about upcoming Meeting the Moment events and other Commission programs and opportunities? Scan the QR code to subscribe to Commission updates.



Acknowledgments

The Commission acknowledges the agencies, organizations, employers, vendors, volunteers, interpreters, CART providers, and community partners whose collaboration made today's celebration possible.



Governor's Proclamation

RECOGNIZING AND COMMEMORATING THE 81ST ANNIVERSARY OF NATIONAL DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH

Recognizing and commemorating the National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

WHEREAS, October 2026 marks the 81st anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of National Disability Employment Awareness Month is to raise awareness of disability employment and celebrate the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the history of National Disability Employment Awareness Month traces back to 1945, when it began as a weeklong recognition of people with physical disabilities; and

WHEREAS, National Disability Employment Awareness Month later expanded to a full month and evolved to recognize all people with disabilities, including those with mental health conditions and other nonobvious disabilities, acknowledging the importance of increasing access to employment; and

WHEREAS, workplaces that welcome the talents of all people, including people with disabilities, including those with mental health conditions and other nonobvious disabilities, are critical to building a strong and inclusive economy in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; and

WHEREAS, activities throughout National Disability Employment Awareness Month reinforce the value and talent that people with disabilities bring to our workplaces and communities and reaffirm the Commonwealth's commitment to ensuring that all people, including people with disabilities, have the opportunity to obtain and maintain meaningful employment;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, **Maura T. Healey**, Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, do hereby proclaim **October 2026** as **National Disability Employment Awareness Month** throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts call upon employers, educational institutions, labor organizations, state agencies, municipalities, businesses, and community organizations throughout Massachusetts to participate in this observance through programs and activities that help ensure people with disabilities have the opportunity to find meaningful employment every month of every year; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts pledges to continue taking steps throughout the year to recruit, hire, retain, and advance individuals with disabilities and to pursue the goals of opportunity, full participation, economic self-sufficiency, and independent living for people with disabilities.

COMMISSION VALUES STATEMENTS

The following values statements are adapted from Work Matters: A Framework for States on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities, published in 2017 by the Council of State Governments (CGS) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

- 1) Disability is a natural part of the human experience that in no way diminishes one's right to fully participate in all aspects of community life across their lifespan.
 - a) As such, state disability policy shall support the following five goals:
 - i) Equitable access to opportunities that contribute to physical and social wellness including inclusive, integrated and adaptive physical activity, sport, recreation and entertainment.
 - ii) Equal opportunity, including treating people with disabilities as individuals, making assessments based on facts, objective evidence and science, and providing effective and meaningful experiences in the most integrated setting appropriate.
 - iii) Full participation in society, including engagement of people with disabilities in relevant decision-making at the individual and systems levels, self-determination, self-advocacy and informed choice.
 - iv) Economic self-sufficiency, including employment-related services and supports, financial literacy, entrepreneurship and work incentives.
 - v) Independent living, including skills development and long-term services and supports.
- 2) Disability can develop at any point during an individual's lifetime and have varying impacts.
 - a) As such, state agencies should ensure service delivery is relevant at all ages, is inclusive of all types of disabilities, and maximizes the strengths and abilities of the individual.
 - b) The Commonwealth of Massachusetts shall provide a centralized systems navigation process so that people with disabilities and their families have a place to ask questions and get answers about rights, responsibilities, services and supports.
- 3) Successful disability policy embraces the "nothing about us without us" principle.
 - a) Individuals with disabilities, as well as families and allies, should be engaged throughout the policymaking process at all levels. This includes increasing the actual participation of people with disabilities at all levels of state government.
- 4) People with disabilities have valuable and unique strengths and contributions yet they are underutilized in our workforce and frequently experience social and economic disadvantage.
 - a) People with disabilities contribute to the rich diversity of our Commonwealth and should be included in all diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in public policy and among private enterprise.
- 5) Employers should make efforts to hire people with disabilities because the workplace is enriched through increased innovation, creativity, and productivity by persons with disabilities.
 - a) State disability employment initiatives should encourage public and private employers of all sizes and industries to adopt and promote a value proposition to include individuals with disabilities in their organizations as employees, customers, and suppliers.

MASSACHUSETTS



COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Tell Us What You Think!

We'd like to hear your thoughts on today's NDEAM Celebration.
Scan the QR code to complete our brief post-event survey.

