



# WorkAbility Subcommittee Report

*“I was the kid who didn’t fit in. The teachers, coaches, others just didn’t know what to do with me. I was bright, I was social, I became a loner until the day I found a job. And that’s why I’m here today. Work is the great equalizer.”*

*“It’s important for people like me to have jobs. Please do everything possible to help more people like me get employment.”*

*“I know as a person with a disability at work I have to constantly prove myself. The bar is higher for me. In other words, we are resilient, we have to be more resourceful and more creative and persevere.”*

*“I would really like to work, I felt so proud of myself for a moment. I almost made friends, I almost felt normal.”*

*“People with disabilities have historically faced enormous hurdles to getting a job. But the fact is that businesses can actually boost their competitive edge by making people with disabilities an integral part of their workforce and consumer base.”*

*“When they ask what his goals for next year, he very loudly says one of the few words he can say clearly: work. The lack of job opportunities is extremely frustrating for him.”*

*People with disabilities can and want to work and be a part of the economic mainstream. As we evolve in inclusion work, we need to ask ourselves three things: who isn’t represented here and has a stake? Are we missing a chance to elevate a new voice? And what angle are we not representing?*

*“I have faced significant barriers in finding and maintaining decent employment.”*

*“Down Syndrome means that it may take us longer time to learn, but we are both very capable and hard-working people.”*

*“Most important is breaking the assumptions of what an individual can and cannot do. It’s a management education issue.”*

*“Employers will interview you because they have to and regardless of how well that interview goes you will not be called back.”*

*“Transportation is another challenge for me. Having limited access to transportation used to limit the time I could work. Two years ago, I qualified for The Ride, and this has helped me so much.”*

*“I’ve encountered many challenges going to work. One of which was lack of work history. Another issue is transportation the cost of transporting me back and forth to work supersedes the ticket to work program.”*

*“People who have Down Syndrome who are non-verbal do have aspirations and desires to work, just like anyone else.”*

*“I have lost almost all of my benefits, it’s hard for people with disabilities to get transportation. It is not fair to us that we don’t have consistent hours and days. It’s hard for people with disabilities not to have enough staff to have enough support at their job.”*

*“People like me really benefit from job supports such as funding for coaches, transportation and training.”*

*“My job is important because it gives me confidence and pride. By earning my own money, I am more independent.”*

*“Finding work that would allow me to make a real difference in my community was my goal for as long as I can remember.”*

*“Many individuals who were never thought capable of engaging in competitive integrated employment are now working safely and independently in the community.”*

*“As a progressive pioneer, MA ushered in universal healthcare and marriage equality to our country. I hope it can also offer more equitable work/wage options and protections for those of us with a disability.”*

*“Since SSI and MassHealth are both income-based programs my reliance on them to survive has deeply impacted my ability to work at the levels I would like to.”*

*“I was a high school math teacher working full-time, things were going great. Unfortunately I had to leave that job on account of going blind. I got connected with the Mass. Commission for the Blind who helped me get the job training skills I needed to get back into the workforce.”*

*“I have autism. I know first hand what it is like to be excluded.”*

*“I believe that we’re in an era of disability inclusion, that we have the opportunity to compete like everybody else does. For two reasons: medical technology has improved and so has transportation and the climate of employment, at least in this country.”*

*“Persons with disabilities have the highest unemployment in the state and we want to connect a very dedicated workforce to those opportunities and that brings a lot of positive results from self-confidence to pride to empowerment.”*



**191<sup>st</sup> General Court  
2019-2020**

**COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND  
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**WORKABILITY SUBCOMMITTEE**

**Final Report  
December 2020**

*Cover image comments drawn from submitted testimony and public hearing*



JOINT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES  
**WORKABILITY SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT: DECEMBER 2020**



WorkAbility Subcommittee members visited Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in July 2019 for a tour and listening session with business leaders and Spaulding staff.

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## Acknowledgments

The WorkAbility Subcommittee members wish to thank Rep. Kay Khan and Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz, co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities (“CCFPD”), for supporting and encouraging the work of the Subcommittee. We are also grateful to Rep. Denise Garlick for providing continued support and expertise throughout the process. The Subcommittee thanks all the state agencies, organizations, businesses and advocates that provided their expertise that contributed to the findings of this report. A detailed list of participants can be found in the Appendix. The Subcommittee would also like to thank the many dedicated staff members who assisted and contributed to our work throughout the term, especially the staff of Chair Khan and Cole Angley, legislative director for Rep. Cutler.

Further, the Subcommittee would like to thank Commissioner Jane Ryder and her staff from the Department of Developmental Services, Commissioner Toni Wolf and her staff from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and Commissioner David D’Arcangelo from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind and his staff. The Commissioners were instrumental in assisting our Subcommittee throughout the session as were Kathy Petkauskos of Work Without Limits, Leo Sarkissian of the Arc of Massachusetts, Oswald Mondejar from Partners Continuing Care, Rick Laferriere of CVS Health, and Joe Bellil from Massachusetts Easter Seals.

## Subcommittee Members

Chair, Rep. Josh S. Cutler, vice-chair, CCFPD

Sen. Diana DiZoglio vice-chair, CCFPD

Rep. Nika Elugardo, member, CCFPD

Rep. Kimberly Ferguson, member, CCFPD

Rep. Tami Gouveia, member, CCFPD

Rep. Stephen Hay, vice-chair, Committee on Labor and Workforce Development

Rep. Jon Hecht, member CCFPD

Rep. Kathy LaNatra, member, Committee on Economic Development & Emerging Technologies

Rep. David LeBoeuf, member, CCFPD

Rep. Matt Muratore, member, Committee on State Administration & Regulatory Oversight

Rep. Michael Soter, member, CCFPD

## Subcommittee Mission Statement

To assess disability employment in the Commonwealth and make recommendations that promote opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate and succeed in the workforce.



Subcommittee visit to J. Polep Distribution Center in Chicopee MA. November 14, 2019. From left to right: Steve D. (J. Polep Senior Manager), Representative Joseph Wagner, Representative Josh Cutler, Representative Stephan Hay, Marc C. (J. Polep Supervisor of Training), Craig K. (J. Polep Senior Manager).

## I. Introduction

The Subcommittee on Workforce Development for Persons with Disabilities, known as the WorkAbility Subcommittee, was proposed by Rep. Cutler in March 2019 and approved by the chairs of the Joint Committee, with the stated purpose of examining **the intersection of disability policy, employment, and workforce development** in the Commonwealth. This report is a culmination of the information gained from stakeholder meetings that took place from the Spring of 2019 to the Winter of 2020. Within this report, the Subcommittee will detail the barriers facing individuals with disabilities from entering the workforce and recommend targeted initiatives to increase workforce participation.

## II. Research & Stakeholder Meetings

The Subcommittee hosted over 40 stakeholder meetings and six events, including a public hearing relative to the disability employment. During the stakeholder meetings, Subcommittee members met state agencies, disability-employment organizations and disability advocates to discuss the key employment barriers for individuals with disabilities and legislative initiatives aimed to drive employment of individuals with disabilities. Subcommittee members also attended and spoke at several events hosted by key stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth.



Leo Vercollone, CEO of VERC Enterprises, and his employees Nicole and John, testifying at the Subcommittee public hearing on October 22, 2019.

### III. Summary of Findings

While Massachusetts overall has made great strides in disability hiring practices and policies, persons with disabilities remain significantly underemployed in the job market in Massachusetts — as they do across the nation. At the onset of the Subcommittee’s work, the Commonwealth’s economy was thriving. In 2019 the Commonwealth’s average unemployment rate was 2.9%, or 0.8% percentage points below the national average.<sup>1</sup> During that year the percentage of individuals with disabilities who were employed was 38.2%, compared to the percentage of individuals without disabilities who were employed at 80.1%.<sup>2</sup> As indicated by the data, a large gap in employment rates persists between individuals with disabilities and those without, despite the thriving economy in 2019.

#### **The Business Case for Hiring Persons with Disabilities is Strong**

**Employers who make deliberate efforts to include hiring individuals with disabilities into their hiring practices and business models told the Subcommittee that doing so is a business imperative and yields a competitive advantage over companies that do not hire from this talent pool.** This was a recurring theme heard from many private sector business leaders. While hiring a diverse set of employees has historically been seen as the right thing to do, employers told the Subcommittee that hiring individuals with disabilities has tangible benefits to their bottom line. Some of these business benefits come in the form of higher

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Dept. of Unemployment, *Massachusetts Workforce and Labor Area Review* (Boston, MA. Economic Research Office 2020) page 4.

<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, *Massachusetts and U.S. Disability Facts & Statistics: 2019* (Boston, MA. Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission)



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employee retention rates, reduced personnel/HR expenses, and stronger customer/brand loyalty. Tax credits, financial incentive programs and altruistic motivations encourage disability hiring practices, but they are not always the primary driver. Instead, we heard from employers that hiring individuals with disabilities brings a diverse perspective to the workplace that can lead to innovation and help the company's bottom line. "Hiring people with disabilities is not just the right thing to do, it's the business smart thing to do," said one business leader.

- For example, a technology company reported collaborating with a neuro-diverse organization that sought to place individuals with neuro-cognitive disabilities into tech-related jobs. One placement assisted an engineering team in advancing a project an approximate six months ahead of schedule.
- VERC Enterprises, a regional retail gas & convenience chain, has built ambitious disability hiring goals into their successful business model. They see a two-fold benefit: happier employees who enjoy their job, and loyal customers who appreciate a local business making a positive impact in the community.

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*"The employees that we bring in under this program are excellent; they are productive, do a great job and add to the workplace culture. And let's not forget smiling faces that have FUN at their jobs! Isn't that the ultimate definition of a good business move?" - CEO Leo Vercollone*

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Members of the Subcommittee and Joint Committee participated in a program called Understanding Our Differences in February, 2020 to help develop a greater appreciation for the challenges individuals with disabilities face. The Newton-based program was co-hosted by Chair Kay Khan.



Members of the WorkAbility Subcommittee visited the Plymouth Bay Clubhouse managed by Vinfen, which offers support services for individuals recovering from mental illness.

Here are additional findings based on the Subcommittee's meetings, public hearings and stakeholder feedback:

- A. Untapped Candidate Pool.** Many businesses reported to the Subcommittee that hiring individuals with disabilities represented a large pool of untapped human resources. During early 2019, the low unemployment rate in Massachusetts resulted in many employers having a difficult time finding qualified employees. Since individuals with disabilities are significantly underrepresented in the workforce, they represent an underutilized source of talent. By widening the scope of their hiring practices, these businesses were able to successfully expand their pool of applicants and find more qualified employees. The companies who are leading the charge in this area note that they recruit from this talent pool in any economic climate to find the best talent for the positions they have available and to continue to strengthen and build upon the diversity and inclusion initiatives in their workplaces. For example, MRC assists companies in expanding the candidate pool by partnering with companies and providing qualified candidates for employment. Other service providers, such as Viability, helped direct candidates to J. Polep Distribution Services for employment.
- B. Employee/Customer Retention.** Many businesses told the Subcommittee that hiring individuals with disabilities represents a good business practice because it boosts employee retention and builds customer loyalty. Disabled and non-disabled employees alike appreciate a company that takes steps to build an inclusive workforce and this translates into strong employee retention, which represents a long term saving. This can be especially important for an existing employee who may develop a disability over the course of employment. If an





employer already has well-established practices and guidelines for employees with disabilities, this will help people who develop disabilities over the course of their employment to retain their job. The same principle extends to customers in many business sectors. Further, hiring individuals with disabilities can set a business a step above a competitor, showing the community that it is hiring diverse candidates and being a responsible corporate actor, which will help companies to win the loyalty of a broad array of customers who value a culture of inclusion.

- CVS Pharmacy, in partnership with the **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC)**, created a pipeline of employment for MRC clients to become pharmacy technicians at CVS locations. CVS told the Subcommittee that the retention rate for MRC clients entering the CVS program was 86% in Massachusetts. CVS explained further that it cost an estimated \$11,000 to train a pharmacy technician over a 6-month period. Many of the technicians left the job after 6 to 9 months. The partnership with MRC and retention rate of MRC clients saved CVS thousands of dollars in training new technicians.

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*“Massachusetts is home to one of our country’s strongest and most vibrant disability employment networks and CVS Health is proud to partner with a number of exceptional organizations here in the Commonwealth on innovative programs that put talented people with disabilities to work. Our state and our workforce are stronger when each and every citizen is provided an opportunity to engage and ultimately thrive in the world of work.”*

*- Rick Laferriere, Director, Workforce Initiatives, CVS Health*

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**C. Change in Culture and Practices.** While the businesses that have succeeded in hiring individuals with disabilities have shown it to be a smart business move, it has not come without necessary changes. Accommodations and workplace adjustments are paramount to the success of employees with disabilities. For instance, businesses told the Subcommittee that a person who could not make it through an initial interview due to a disability may have been excluded from the hiring pool. Making targeted investments into hiring protocols and business practices can assist a company to hire and retain more individuals with disabilities. Some of the most common examples the Subcommittee heard include:

- a. Train human resource personnel to understand and remove the multiple barriers to entry for persons with disabilities. It is vital that recruiters and managers are trained on disability etiquette and interviewing guidelines, and that an employer’s website and job applications are accessible to individuals with disabilities. For example, an online application that cannot be completed by an individual with a visual impairment means that the employer is unknowingly excluding a group from applying. Further,



businesses can offer different interview formats to applicants who need an accommodation, such as having a job coach present or offering online or phone interviews. Responsible and business-savvy companies are training their hiring departments and managers to ensure accessibility of applications, interviews and support systems after employees are hired.

- b. Company-wide unconscious bias training can assist in creating a culture that is accepting of individuals with disabilities. When an employee works in an environment that is accepting of challenges that face individuals with disabilities, it makes it easier for that employee to raise issues with their employer. Specifically training managers to manage the work and not the disability can help companies create and sustain a positive work culture from the top down. Employers told the Subcommittee that buy-in from the highest levels of management is critical to cultural changes in a business.
- c. Create Employee Resource Groups (ERG). A number of larger businesses reported success in establishing a model known as Employee Resource Groups. ERGs are formed within a company by employees who share a common interest, characteristic or lived experience such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, military status or disability. The purpose of an ERG is to serve as a resource for both employees and the company by providing activities, information and awareness. A key aspect of an ERG is to set and work towards goals that align with the company's mission, values and business objectives. Disability ERGs are usually cross-disability, as opposed to being focused on a specific type of disability. Members use their perspective and first-hand knowledge to educate others about disability etiquette, accessibility and accommodations. Members of Disability ERGs also help recruit and retain candidates with disabilities, serve as mentors to other employees with disabilities, and provide employees and the company with information and resources.



Subcommittee members listen to testimony from Hanson resident James Sinocchi, Head of Disability Inclusion for JPMorgan Chase.



**D. Models that are working.** While the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities remains high, there are models that exist in Massachusetts that are showing results:

- a. Regional Employment Collaboratives. As partnerships of state agencies, employers, workforce development entities, and employment service providers, the Regional Employment Collaboratives (REC) work toward the common goal of increasing employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The Regional Employment Collaboratives' efforts focus on 1) broadening the range of businesses seeking to employ job-seekers that are served by the RECs partners and 2) enhancing access to career-oriented training and resources. The RECs are designed to create a more streamlined and efficient way for businesses to access qualified candidates while also supporting service providers to meet the employment needs of job-ready candidates with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>
  - i. All six Regional Employment Collaboratives are funded by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Two Employment Collaboratives – the Central Mass Employment Collaborative (CMEC) and the Western Mass Employment Collaborative (WMEC) – are co-funded by the Department of Mental Health (DMH).<sup>4</sup>
  - ii. In Fiscal Year 2020, the RECs helped place 768 individuals in employment through their partnership with over 160 community-based organizations and hundreds of employers. RECs connect employers to job-seekers and support those employers and employees through continued training and assistance.<sup>5</sup>
- b. Business and Provider Partnership. Businesses find success in hiring individuals with disabilities when they can effectively collaborate with a state agency or employment service provider organization. For example, the Subcommittee visited J. Polep Distribution Services Inc. in Chicopee. J. Polep partners with a local service provider for individuals with disabilities, Viability, Inc, to create a pipeline of talent into their workforce. J.Polep, in tandem with employment Viability staff, provide additional orientation and training seminars for new hires to allow individuals a chance to learn and grow at a pace conducive with their own abilities. J. Polep also “trains the trainers” to ensure inclusion is at the forefront of trainers’ minds when training new hires. They also explained to the Subcommittee that employee morale across the board has improved since the

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<sup>3</sup> Massachusetts Regional Employment Collaboratives: An Anchor in the Storm, *The Regional Employment Collaboratives' Response to COVID-19*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



partnership. With buy-in from management this partnership has been successful in both employing individuals with disabilities and helping the business grow and retain employees.

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*“Employees have opened their hearts and minds and such changed the culture by serving as a reminder that the most fundamental part of life is feeling needed and respected.” – J. Polep Distribution Services*

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- c. Individual/Group Supported Employment. DDS- and DDS-funded service providers provide consumers with community-based employment or community-based day program services. The employment services include individual or group supported and competitive employment options. Below are some figures provided by DDS’s 2019 report:

Service Type	June 2014	June 2015	June 2016	June 2017	October 2018
Individual Supported Employment	2,748	2,900	3,146	3,388	3,656
Small Group Supported Employment	2,911	3,103	3,367	3,395	3,300
Community-Based Day Support Services*	3,748	5,116	6,137	6,482	6,907 <sup>6</sup>

- d. Vocational Rehabilitation Services. MRC’s Vocational Rehabilitation Division assists MRC clients with disabilities in preparing for obtaining a job. Vocational rehabilitation assists with several facets of employment such as, but not limited to: training programs and partnerships with employers and educational institutions and programs; job coaching services; and interview preparation and job placement services.<sup>7</sup>
- e. Massachusetts Clubhouse Coalition. Clubhouses are nationally accredited and Department of Mental Health (DMH)-staffed non-profit organizations that support DMH clients in employment services. Clubhouses employ a partnership co-op model in which the Clubhouse reserves certain jobs at a given employer and sends clients to fill those jobs. Clients and staff are responsible for covering the position. Further, clients work in the Clubhouses themselves and are given duties that develop and encourage soft skills training.

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<sup>6</sup> Fiscal Year 2019 Progress Report on DDS Employment First Initiative, Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services.

<sup>7</sup> Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, *2019 Annual Year End Report* (Boston, MA. Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission).



The Subcommittee met with UMass Medical School's Work Without Limits' Business Partners Roundtable to hear about successes and challenges in private sector disability hiring.

**E. Barriers remain.** While many companies and service providers have made strides in obtaining and retaining employment for individuals with disabilities, barriers to employment remain for individuals with disabilities. This section will outline the common themes and barriers that the Subcommittee heard during stakeholder meetings.

- a. Transportation. Getting to and from the place of employment is a major factor for a person with a disability when considering whether or not to apply and take a job. Accessibility of public transportation and paratransit services such as The Ride are critical. In areas without robust public transportation options, this becomes even more of a challenge. Lack of transportation is an issue that faces the workforce as a whole, but the disability community is especially affected.
- b. General Discomfort or Unfamiliarity Regarding People with Disabilities. An issue the Subcommittee heard on a frequent basis was that employers are often uncomfortable or do not know how to approach employing individuals with disabilities. Whether it be concerns about high accommodation costs, fear that managing performance will lead to legal action, lack of awareness of available services, or misconceptions about individuals with disabilities, a general sense of discomfort or unfamiliarity regarding people with disabilities can create barriers to successful employment. Some businesses that have developed strong disability hiring practices cited these lack of awareness issues as hurdles that had to be overcome on the road to success. In some cases it took a senior level person to push forward and in others it was more of a bottom-up effort that helped to change the culture.



- c. Workforce Hiring Crisis. Nearly all of the issues raised heretofore are exacerbated by the current workforce crisis facing disability providers. The **Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers (ADDP)** explained to the Subcommittee that the providers they represent are faced with significant staffing level and pay ratio issues. Service providers generally make \$14 to \$16 dollars per hour, and care providers can make far more if they work for the state as opposed to a private provider. This has caused issues with attracting and retaining entry-level staff to provide for individuals with disabilities within the private provider network.
- d. Access to Employment. Getting into the physical space of an office or building can be a barrier to individuals with disabilities, especially those using a wheel-chair or other assistive devices. In Massachusetts, not all buildings and office spaces are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If a person cannot physically access their workspace, and employers do not have the resources or willingness to accommodate them, individual with disabilities may be unable to function in their job. Further, business websites and applications may inadvertently discriminate against candidates who can't access them due to a disability.

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*“Imagine you come to work, and all the elevators are shut down. The staircases have been replaced with climbing walls like you would see in a rock gym. Every bathroom is out of order. All the chairs have been removed from all the offices, but your desks are still at their normal height. The hallways have been mostly filled with large filing cabinets you have to maneuver around. Would you be able to be productive in such an environment? This is the situation for people with physical disabilities when there are steps or curbs at the entrances of buildings, when there are no elevators or ramps, when there is insufficient turning space for wheelchairs or walkers ...”*

*– Lenny Somervell, Disability Policy Consortium*

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- e. ‘Cliff Effect’. The “Cliff Effect” is the sudden reduction to public benefits when a person enters the workforce or household earnings increase. This can be disruptive for families because even though earnings increase, they usually have not increased enough for self-sufficiency. In other words, they make too much money to receive the benefits but not enough money to sustain themselves and their household. For an individual with a disability who is receiving services from state or federal agencies, often those benefits and services are tied to income. A person with a disability may be disincentivized to take a job, accept a raise or promotion, or increase the number of hours if it means a reduction to benefits that they depend on. The “Cliff Effect” is frequently cited by individuals and employers as a barrier to expanded disability



employment. In addition to the actual “Cliff Effect,” the Subcommittee heard concerns about benefits management and not having clear answers ahead of time as to what impact changes might have on benefits. Some good resources do exist such as the **Work Without Limits** benefits counseling service.

- f. Lack of Opportunities for Individuals with Significant Disabilities. The Subcommittee heard testimony from advocacy groups and parents/guardians that their loved one was significantly disabled and either not suitable or not comfortable working in a competitive employment model. Some felt the transition from Sheltered Workshops to integrated and supported employment had left them without meaningful experiences and without promised resources. As a result some were left with only occasional volunteer opportunities. Additional concerns were raised of disparities in access to services across geographic regions of the Commonwealth which may result in families and persons with disabilities in more isolated areas being underserved.
- g. Self-Identification Concerns. Some candidates applying for jobs are fearful that if they disclose their disability on an employment form, a business may look at their application unfavorably compared to candidates who are not disabled. One company told the Subcommittee that self-identification nearly doubled after initial hiring. This creates problems in the long run as it may be more difficult for a business to adequately accommodate an employee, or hamper efforts to accurately reflect actual disability hiring levels.



MCB Commissioner David D’Arcangelo and staff hosted members of the WorkAbility Subcommittee to learn more about the technology in use to assist visual impairment.



## IV. Recommendations

The following section offers recommendations from the Subcommittee to help increase employment for persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth. These recommendations are not intended to solve every issue or finding relative to the barriers that face individuals with disabilities. Some of these issues are beyond the scope of this Subcommittee and will take continued research, funding and collaboration between stakeholders to be fully addressed. In making these recommendations the Subcommittee has sought to adopt a pragmatic approach with an eye toward solutions that are specific, achievable and realistic.

Here are the Subcommittee's recommendations. Each is described in greater detail below:

- **Establish a permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities**
- **Expand use of Regional Employment Collaboratives**
- **Create partnerships with ride share services**
- **Support disability hiring benchmarks for smaller businesses**
- **Remove physical/technical barriers to employment**
- **Set new disability hiring goals in state contracting**
- **Mitigate 'Cliff Effect' with benefits management resources**
- **Improve support for individuals with significant disabilities and monitor geographic disparities**
- **Establish State House internship program for persons with disabilities**
- **Plan a self-identification PSA Campaign**
- **Create disability hiring tax incentives and promote existing federal incentives**

**RECOMMENDATION #1: ESTABLISH PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.** The Commonwealth has a long history of commissions and ad-hoc groups that in part addressed issues facing individuals with disabilities, both in employment as well as other aspects of daily living. In 1993, Gov. Weld established a Special Advisory Commission on Disability Policy. In 2008, Gov. Patrick established a Disability Task Force on Employment with the purpose of increasing employment of persons





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with disabilities in the Executive Branch. Many of these commissions were established by Executive Order and dissolved following a transition in administration. There are success stories as well, such as the Massachusetts Developmental Disability Council (MDDC), an independent educational agency supported with federal funding which continues as a key voice for development disability community.

Establishing a commission that bridges both the Legislative and Executive branches and key stakeholder groups will ensure permanent platform to the disability community and enhance communication. The Commission is modelled after the successful Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, and like that commission, can play an active role in advocating for policy and legislation.

The Subcommittee acknowledges and thanks Rep. Denise Provost for her work in filing the original Commission legislation. This Commission would be tasked with investigating and reporting on:

- a. Any disparities across service/geographical 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 establish a bridge to self-sufficiency and engage school supports, family members and employers;
- e. The status of the Commonwealth's efforts to be a "model employer" by seeking to increase the number of persons with disabilities working in state government and any other state requirements that promote diversity of state employment;
- f. The number of persons with disabilities who apply for state disability services and are unsuccessful in receiving services;
- g. Facilitate and promote public awareness for the employment of persons with disabilities in both the public and private sector;
- h. Advise the Executive and Legislative branches of state government on the impact of proposed legislation on persons with disabilities; and
- i. Promote collaboration amongst state agencies, services providers and employment services for persons with disabilities.

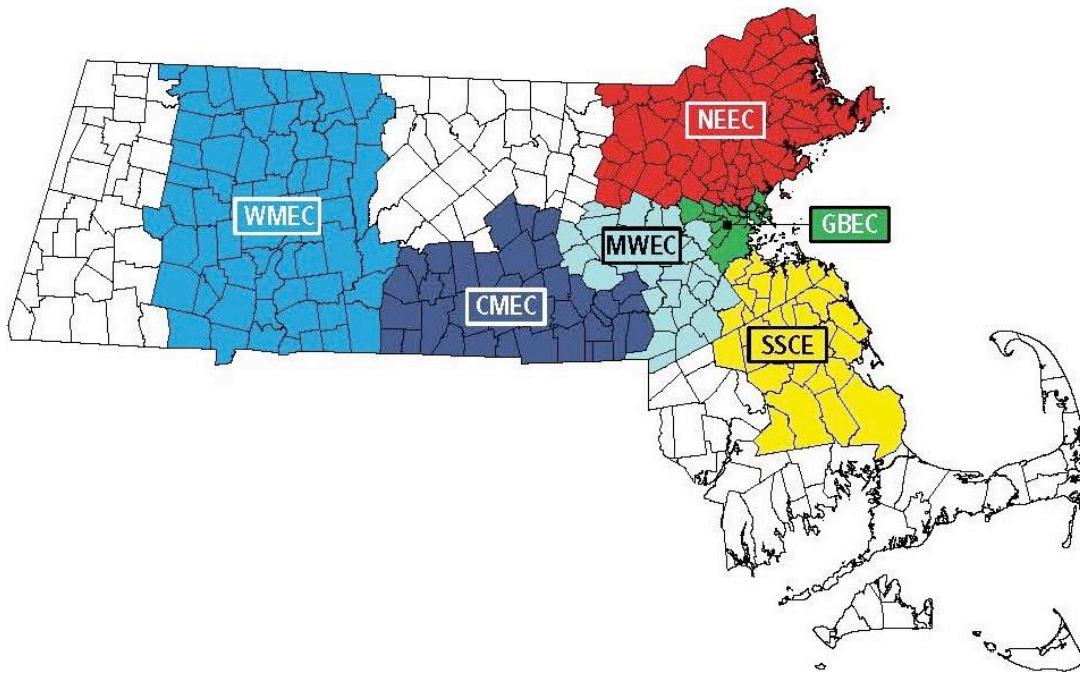
**The Subcommittee is pleased to report that this Commission has now been established.**

As next steps, the Subcommittee recommends seeking a funding line item in the FY22 budget and then working to build out the Commission. The Subcommittee envisions this permanent Commission as the logical extension, expansion and amplification of the Subcommittee's work this term.



**RECOMMENDATION #2: EXPAND REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT**

**COLLABORATIVES.** Currently, Regional Employment Collaboratives (REC) do not cover the entire geographic area of the Commonwealth; see map below. The Commonwealth should fund Regional Employment Collaboratives in the areas of the state that are not currently covered.



The REC model offers a proven and relatively low-cost approach to expanding disability employment and connecting service providers and private sector employers. The MetroWest Employment Collaborative was recently funded in the Fiscal Year 2020 budget for \$100,000. The remaining uncovered areas in the Commonwealth could be incorporated into existing Collaboratives and have their appropriations increased accordingly. The Commonwealth could also create distinct regional Collaboratives in each area not currently being served.

As noted previously, that MRC has been successful in partnering with private businesses to place MRC clients in competitive employment. Through MRC's Vocational Rehabilitation Division, MRC provides counseling, guidance and assistance in job placement for clients. The REC model is not intended to replace or compete with MRC's Vocational Rehabilitation Division, but instead bolster potential avenues and employment pipelines for individuals with disabilities. Further, the current REC models serve clients outside of MRC's scope. The Subcommittee hopes by improving access to potential options for individuals with disabilities, more people can be served across the Commonwealth. **At the same time, the Subcommittee also recommends that current and future RECs work to ensure that individuals with more severe disabilities can also benefit from their efforts.**



**RECOMMENDATION #3: PARTNERSHIPS WITH RIDE SHARE SERVICES.** The WorkAbility Subcommittee had the opportunity to hear from the Plymouth Transportation Pilot Program (TPP), a partnership between several non-profit service providers from the Plymouth area and Lyft, the ride-share service. TPP pools together provider money and contracts with Lyft to create a separate ride-share service for individuals with disabilities served by the providers, referred to as “clients.” At a reduced price and using a private application, the TPP allows service providers to arrange rides for their clients to get to work, doctor appointments, and similar commitments. Pilot programs that utilize ride-share services can help address transportation issues in areas that lack public transportation. The Legislature should assist community organizations and non-profit agencies in creating ride-share pilot programs for individuals with disabilities, especially in urban and suburban areas.

- j. This program received an earmark in the Fiscal Year 2019 Budget filed by Rep. Muratore to get the pilot program off the ground. Since then, the TPP has been operating successfully in the Greater Plymouth area, providing necessary transportation to individuals with disabilities. The TPP is working on creating a permanent program funded by member organizations to continue the service.
- k. The Legislature needs to be aware when addressing transportation revenue to ensure programs that assist individuals with disabilities are taken into consideration. The House of Representatives included an amendment into H.4508, *An Act relative to transportation finance* with this concern in mind. The legislation would have implemented a fee increase on ride-share services. The amendment carved out an exception for paratransit services, such as the pilot programs in Plymouth. This amendment would help reduce costs for these transportation services for individuals with disabilities.

**RECOMMENDATION #4: SUPPORT DISABILITY HIRING BENCHMARKS FOR SMALLER BUSINESSES.** The Subcommittee recognized early that many large private sector businesses have made significant strides in disability hiring practices. Understanding the business benefits of disability inclusive hiring, some companies have established dedicated disability hiring and recruitment coordinators, progressive HR departments and employee resource groups. With additional nurturing, this culture of inclusion can spread more easily to smaller and mid-size businesses that do not necessarily have the same institutional supports or comfort level.

The national non-profit Disability:IN offers comprehensive benchmarking tools to encourage inclusive hiring practices. Their Disability Equality Index (DEI) measures disability inclusion practices and highlights high-scoring businesses with its prestigious awards for “Best Places to Work for Disability Inclusion.” In Massachusetts, Disability:IN partners with the University of Massachusetts Medical School’s **Work Without Limits program** to hosts



a yearly conference where they celebrate and award the top Fortune 500 Companies in the Commonwealth. Their 2019 awardees included major Massachusetts businesses such as Fidelity, Raytheon, State Street, Spaulding, TD Bank, Dell, Blue Cross, Blue Shield, and CVS Health.

The Subcommittee recommends the establishment of similar disability inclusion designation geared toward business outside of the Fortune 500. The Subcommittee also recommends the establishment of a recognition program bringing together business leaders and legislators, modelled on the successful Unsung Heroine Award hosted by the Commission on the Status of Women. Legislators could nominate Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (DOBE's) or businesses succeeding in the disability hiring space in their district to receive recognition at the State House as a way of promoting these success stories.

**RECOMMENDATION #5: REMOVE PHYSICAL/TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT.** The Subcommittee recommends further review of existing discrepancies between the ADA and the current Massachusetts Building Code so as to remove barriers for individuals with disabilities in physically accessing employment spaces. H.2029, *An Act relative to Architectural Access Board* addresses many of these issues. Any decisions relative to architectural design should include members of the disability community. Further, the Commonwealth should ensure that all public websites and any job postings on public websites are fully accessible to individuals with disabilities, especially those who are visually impaired to ensure compatibility with screen readers.

**RECOMMENDATION #6: SET NEW DISABILITY HIRING GOALS IN STATE CONTRACTING.** Currently, the state Supplier Diversity Office (SDO) in coordination with the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD), sets goals for the participation of individuals with disabilities in state procurement contracting. The SDO and MOD disability pilot program sets a goal of 7% inclusion of qualified individuals with disabilities in any state contract for three services specified by the SDO. The Subcommittee applauds these efforts and recommends this goal be increased to 10% and applied to an expanded range of covered services. More aggressive goals will boost disability employment in state government and continue to move the Commonwealth towards becoming a “Model Employer” in word and deed. Implementing such standards via annual stepped increases, as envisioned in H.2671, *An Act relative to the employment of persons with disabilities on state contracts*, offers one sensible approach to accomplish this goal. The Subcommittee also embraces the additional supplier diversity goals set forth by SDO & MOD in their 2019 Report to Legislature.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Supplier Diversity Office, Fiscal Year 2019 Report to the Legislature on the Expansion of Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities in State Procurement and Contracting.



**RECOMMENDATION #7: MITIGATE ‘CLIFF EFFECT’ WITH BENEFITS MANAGEMENT RESOURCES.** The “Cliff Effect” can be mitigated by providing individuals and their families clear and timely information to assist them in understanding how and when their public benefits will be affected should they change employment or increase earnings. Trained and certified benefits counselors and easily accessible benefits calculators should be made available by the state. Our Subcommittee understands that the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce is developing a benefits calculator for Commonwealth residents to understand how increased wages will affect their state benefits. Additionally, both UMass Medical School’s Work Without Limits program and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission employ expert-level benefits specialists, called Community Work Incentive Counselors (CWICs) who have been trained and certified by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and who must keep their certification current through continuing education credits. CWICs are well-versed in federal and state benefits and related work incentive programs including Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI), Medicare, Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and subsidized housing programs. Resources provided by SSA to support the CWIC program have been level-funded for twenty years and demand for the service outweighs resources. This Subcommittee supports the efforts of both EOLWD and the CWIC programs and recommends additional funding.

**RECOMMENDATION #8. IMPROVE SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES AND MONITOR GEOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES.** The Subcommittee recognizes that individuals with more significant disabilities need more robust support services in order to be successful in community-based employment programs. These services are impacted by the ongoing workforce crisis in the provider community. The Subcommittee notes recent progress by the Legislature and Administration to address Chapter 257 rate funding which will directly assist this population and better reflects cost of direct care and staff wages. The Legislature should continue to work with DDS, service providers, and individuals to ensure that appropriate funding is available to service providers to ensure they have the capacity to serve these individuals so they, in turn, can have meaningful work opportunities. The Subcommittee also recommends that further review is needed to monitor disparities in service levels across geographical areas of the Commonwealth. The transition away from Sheltered Workshops was a necessary and important step, but it is vital that individuals with more significant disabilities not be left underserved as a result. The Subcommittee recommends that the Permanent Commission be tasked with this effort, once it is organized and activated.



**RECOMMENDATION #9: ESTABLISH A STATE HOUSE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES WITH MRC.** State House internships can provide valuable work experience, open doors to future employment and light the spark of public service and civic engagement that can last a lifetime. Establishing a formal internship program in conjunction with MRC will offer valuable work study opportunities for individuals with disabilities, provide a benefit to members and their existing staff and help to make the State House more diverse and reflective of the communities we all serve. See Appendix for outline of proposed program with the Mass. Rehabilitation Commission. The Subcommittee is grateful to former Speaker DeLeo, Speaker Mariano, Rep. Wagner and other legislators who kindly agreed to participate in such a pilot program. The Subcommittee also appreciates the efforts of Chairman Moran, the House Human Resource office, and Joint Committee on Personnel and Administration staff for their assistance. This effort had to be suspended due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The Subcommittee recommends that this effort be revisited when safe to do so. Once established this program could be extended to formally include other key partners, such as the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind.

**RECOMMENDATION #10: PLAN SELF-IDENTIFICATION PSA CAMPAIGN.** A public awareness campaign leveraging well known public and private sector leaders can help encourage individuals with disabilities to voluntarily and confidentially self-identify. Voluntary self-identification can offer many tangible benefits such as access to accommodations and support resources, as well as intangible benefits such as removing stigmas and promoting a more inclusive workplace culture. At a macro level, self-ID improves efforts to measure and monitor progress in disability hiring. October is Disability Awareness Month and this would be a natural time to conduct an annual “Count Me In!” campaign. PSAs with the Governor, House Speaker, Senate President or other prominent state leaders could help drive this message. Some state agencies do already participate in annual Self-ID programs, but those efforts are not necessarily uniform, or well known, across the spectrum of the state workforce.

**RECOMMENDATION #11. CREATE DISABILITY HIRING TAX INCENTIVE AND PROMOTE EXISTING FEDERAL INCENTIVES.** Currently Massachusetts businesses are eligible for federal tax credits such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and accommodation tax credits under IRS Section 190 and Section 44. These federal tax credits may be less well-known or accessible to smaller and mid-sized business. Further education and promotion of these tax advantages would also help promote disability hiring practices. The Commonwealth should also study the potential implementation of additional state-based tax incentive programs, including:



- 1) Tax Credits for Hiring Individuals with Disabilities: The Commonwealth could offer a state tax incentive to businesses for initial hiring of individuals with disabilities. States like New York, Louisiana, Delaware, Iowa, North Dakota and Tennessee offer such state tax credits. The credits range in size and scale, some providing a one-time initial tax credit, while others allow for businesses to utilize a tax credit over several years as long as the individual retains employment.
- 2) Tax Credits for Barrier Removal and Employment Support for Individuals with Disabilities: The Commonwealth could offer tax credits for structural changes to facilities to ensure they are accessible to individuals with disabilities. States like Arizona, Iowa, Kansas and Maryland allow for businesses and taxpayers who incur costs for the purposes of making facilities accessible to claim income tax credits. These credits vary in size and amount from state to state.

## **V. Conclusion**

The WorkAbility Subcommittee has devoted 18 months of study, met with more than 100 disability advocates, conducted nearly a dozen site visits, and reviewed 39 pieces of public testimony, and yet in many ways has merely scratched the surface of the multi-faceted issue of disability hiring and employment in the Commonwealth.

Some issues, such as closer scrutiny and oversight of the subminimum wage for workers with disabilities have not been addressed, and others such as staffing levels and workforce hiring payrates deserve more attention than the Subcommittee has been able to offer here.

Nonetheless, the Subcommittee is proud of the work we have done and pleased to submit this suite of recommendations. As a whole they offer a broad spectrum of achievable goals to remove barriers and create more opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate and succeed in the workforce.

The Subcommittee is particularly pleased that one of our key recommendation has already been adopted: the establishment of a Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This Commission will be better situated to continue the work of this ad-hoc subcommittee in a broader way and ensure a strong platform for communication amongst the diverse, public-private set of stakeholders who do so much to advocate for individuals with disabilities.

The next steps will be critical to the Commission future success, including a minimum funding level to allow for the hiring of an executive director, and the appointment of qualified individuals to serve in the designated Commission roles.



## Appendix A: Stakeholder Meetings

<b>WorkAbility Subcommittee stakeholder meetings</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Representatives</b>
April 22, 2019	State House	The Arc of Massachusetts	Leo Sarkissian, Executive Director
April 22, 2019	State House	Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development	Jessica Muradian, Deputy Chief of Staff and Director of Legislative Affairs and Policy
April 29, 2019	Marshfield	Road to Responsibility	Christopher White, President/CEO
May 8, 2019	State House	Department of Developmental Services	Christopher Klaskin, Ombudsman & Legislative Liaison
May 8, 2019	State House	Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission	Toni A. Wolf, Commissioner Erik Nordahl, Acting General Counsel/Legislative Liaison
May 9, 2019	State House	Meeting on Closure of Sheltered Workshops with Rep. Garlick & Rep. Khan	Tom Sannicandro, Director, Mass. Association of Community Colleges
May 10, 2019	Duxbury	Verc Enterprises	Leo Vercollone, CEO
May 16, 2019	State House	UMass Medical School's Work Without Limits	Kathy Petkauskos, Director
May 16, 2019	Duxbury	Verc Enterprises	Nicole, IDD Employee & Advocate
June 18, 2019	State House	Massachusetts Easter Seals	Paul Medeiros, President & CEO Maryellen Macrae, Director of Community Support Services Joe Bellil, VP of Public Affairs & Youth Services
June 21, 2019	Duxbury	Verc Enterprises	John, IDD Employee and Advocate
June 26, 2019	State House	CVS	Rick Laferriere, Senior Manager, Workforce Initiatives
June 26, 2019	State House	Disability Law Center, Inc.	Richard Glassman, Director of Advocacy
July 2, 2019	State House	Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston	Cindy Thomas, Interim Director
July 17, 2019	State House	Massachusetts Office on Disability	Naomi Goldberg, Assistant Director for Client Services Rob Dias, Advocate Christina Belforti, Advocate
July 17, 2019	State House	Community Systems Inc.	Maria Campbell, Executive Director
July 31, 2019	State House	Riverside Community Care	Don Hughes, Vice-President, Community Living Services Division Stephanie L. Marks, Director, Employment Collaboratives





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July 31, 2019	State House	Disability Policy Consortium	Lenny Somervell, Lead Organizer
August 13, 2019	State House	Department of Development Services	Jane Ryder, Commissioner Christopher Klaskin, Ombudsman & Legislative Liaison
August 12, 2019	State House	State House ADA Coordinator	Carl Richardson
August 28, 2019	State House	Governor Baker's Staff & Office of Access and Opportunity	Kaitlyn Sprague, Office of Gov. Baker Legislative Director Tony Richards, Director of Office of Access and Opportunity Juanita Allen, Diversity & Recruitment Manager Sandra Borders, Director of Diversity, Inclusion & Equal Opportunity
September 11, 2019	Pembroke	New England Villages	Career & Community Exploration Center opening
September 11, 2019	State House	Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council	Kristin Britton, Deputy Director, Policy and Programs Kris Callahan, Policy Analyst
September 18, 2019	State House	House Human Resources and EEO	John McLaugherty, House EEO
September 18, 2019	State House	House Human Resources	Kathy Palmer, Director of Human Resources
September 25, 2019	State House	JPMorgan Chase & Co.	Jim Sinocchi, Head of Disability Inclusion, JPMorgan Chase
September 25, 2019	State House	Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers	Ellen Attaliades, President & CEO, ADDP Mandy Nichols, VP, ADDP
September 30, 2019	Marshfield	South Shore Collaborative on Employment	David Urban, Employment Liaison Cindy Thomas, Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston
October 2, 2019	State House	Partners Continuing Care	Oswald "Oz" Mondejar, Senior Vice President of Missions and Advocacy
October 4, 2019	State House	Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress	Maureen Gallagher, Executive Director Josh Komyerov, Communication and Operations Director Jane Lane, Legislative Consultant
October 15, 2019	State House	Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development	Jennifer James, Undersecretary for Workforce Development Jessica Muradian, Deputy Chief of Staff and Director of Legislative Affairs and Policy



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October 23, 2019	State House	Massachusetts Commission on the Blind	David D’Arcangelo, Commissioner
October 25, 2019	Duxbury Senior Center	Dept. of Developmental Services, Former Southeast Director	Casey Seaman, retired Southeast Director
November 6, 2019	State House	COFAR	Dave Kassell, Communications Director Patty Garritty, Member Dominique Demar, Cory Associates
November 6, 2019	State House	Triangle, Inc.	Coleman Nee, Executive Director
November 13, 2019	State House	Massachusetts Office on Disability	Mary Mahon McCauley, Commissioner
November 14, 2019	Chicopee	J. Polep Distribution Services	Rep. Joseph Wagner Rep. Stephan Hay J. Polep Staff
November 20, 2019	State House	Workforce Solutions Group/Lowell MassHire	Raija Vaisanen, Associate Director, Mass Workforce Association Nancy Gagnon, MassHire Lowell Career Center Ellen Waszak, Disability Advisor
November 20, 2019	Dorchester	Work, Inc.	Rep. David Biele Andrea Mitsch, Communication Director, WORK INC. Jim Cassetta, President/CEO, WORK Inc.
December 11, 2019	State House	Operational Services Division	Bill McAvoy, Deputy Assistant Secretary - Legal, Policy and Compliance
December 16, 2019	State House	MA Clubhouse Coalition	Reva Stein, Executive Director, MA Clubhouse Coalition Don Hughes, Riverside Community Care
February 5, 2020	Plymouth	Massachusetts State House: DDS Transportation Pilot Program	Rep. Muratore Rep. LaNatra DDS Commissioner Ryder Chris Klaskin, DDS DDS Chief of Staff Casey Seaman, TTP member Will Shain, TTP
February 10, 2019	Plymouth	MA Clubhouse Coalition Visit	Reva Stein, Executive Director, MA Clubhouse Coalition Don Hughes, Riverside Community Care Rep. Matt Muratore Rep. Kathy LaNatra
March 5, 2019	Plymouth	DDS South East Meeting with Bank of America	Rep. Cutler DDS staff Bank of America staff



## Appendix B: Events Hosted/Attended

<b>WorkAbility Subcommittee Hosted Events</b>			
	<b>Location</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Representatives</b>
April 23, 2019	State House	Organizing meeting	Rep. Josh Cutler, Vice-Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities Sen. Diana DiZoglio Vice-Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities Rep. Stephen Hay Vice-Chair, Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development Rep. Jon Hecht Rep. Matt Muratore Rep. Tami Gouveia Rep. David LeBoeuf Rep. Nika Elugardo Rep. Kathy LaNatra
May 21, 2019	State House	Information Briefing	Leo Sarkissian, Arc of Massachusetts Executive Director Kathy Petkauskos, Work Without Limits Director Rep. Matthew Muratore Rep. Stephen Hay Rep. Denise Garlick Office of Rep. David LeBoeuf Office of Rep. Nika Elugardo
	State House	Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Working Partners Employer Advisory Board	Toni Wolf, Commissioner Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Joan Phillips, Assistant Commissioner, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission William Allen, Statewide Director of Placement Services, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Oswald "Oz" Mondejar, Senior Vice President of Missions and Advocacy, Partners Continuing Care Rick Laferriere, Senior Manager, Workforce Initiatives, CVS Health Jon DaSilva, Workforce Initiatives, Manager, CVS Health Rhonda Aubin-Smith, District Director, US Dept. of Labor – OFCCP, Boston District Office Gary MacDonald, Executive Vice President, AIM HR Solutions Richard Curtis, VP Talent Acquisition, State Street Caitlin Hietsch, MGH / Partners, Recruitment Services Michele Mitchell, Westaff Sandy Jones, Placement Assistant, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Rep. David LeBoeuf Rep. Matthew Muratore Rep. Jonathan Hecht
July 25, 2019	Spaulding Rehab Hospital, Boston	Meeting with UMass Medical School's Work Without Limits	Kathy Petkauskos, Director, Work Without Limits Bonnie Rivers, Director of Employer Services, Work Without Limits



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		Business Partners Roundtable	Christie Hager, Managing Director, Public and Private Health Solutions, UMass Medical School John Erwin, Vice Chancellor for Government Relations, UMass Medical School Rep. Jonathan Hecht Office of Rep. Denise Garlick Office of Rep. Matthew Muratore Rep. Kathy LaNatra Office of Rep. Nika Elugardo David Storto, President of Partners Continuing Care and Spaulding Rehabilitation Network Oswald "Oz" Mondejar, Senior Vice President of Missions and Advocacy, Partners Continuing Care Laura Stout, Director Contract Operations and President Empowering Abilities ERG / Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Brenda Kirouac, Assistant Vice President/Human Resources Manager, Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston Hale Pulsifer, Director of Finance & Customer Accessibility Lead, Fidelity Investments Richard Curtis, HR Consultant, formerly with State Street Kristine Biagiotti, IT Business Partner & North America True Ability ERG Co-Lead, Dell Allyson Schiller, Northeast Diversity Leader, PwC Colleen Moran, Spaulding Rehab Network/Partners Healthcare
September 17, 2019	Worcester DCU Center	MRC 2019 TRAINING CONFERENCE "Bridging the Gap"	Rep. Cutler served as keynote speaker
October 4, 2019	Boston Center for Independent Living	Employment Advocacy Group Meeting	
October 11, 2019	Four Points Sheraton: Work Without Limits "Raise the Bar HIRE" Conference	University of Massachusetts Medical School Work without Limits	Disability Equality Index (DEI) awards
October 22, 2019	State House	Public Hearing	
October 30, 2019	State House	ADDP Legislative Briefing	
October 21, 2020	Virtual Work Without Limits "Raise the Bar HIRE" Conference	University of Massachusetts Medical School Work Without Limits	DEI awards

# Appendix C-1



JOSH S. CUTLER  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
6TH PLYMOUTH DISTRICT

STATE HOUSE, ROOM 167  
TEL. (617) 722-2810  
Josh.Cutler@MAhouse.gov

*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1054

Committees:  
Vice Chairman  
Children, Families & Persons with Disabilities  
Ways and Means  
Higher Education  
Telecommunications, Utilities & Energy

**TO:** Speaker DeLeo, Chair Kahn, Chair Moran

**CC:** Katherine Palmer, House Director Human Resources; Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

**FROM:** Rep. Josh Cutler

**DATE:** December 13, 2019

**RE:** Proposal for State House Internship Program for Persons with Disabilities

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Mr. Speaker, Chair Kahn & Chair Moran, I'm pleased to follow up on some of our prior conversations to formalize my proposal for a State House Internship program for persons with disabilities.

State House internships can provide valuable work experience, open doors to future employment and light the spark of public service and civic engagement that can last a lifetime. (I can speak from experience as a former State House intern myself!)

I believe that an internship program for persons with disabilities would truly be a win-win for all involved. It will offer valuable work study opportunities for individuals with disabilities, provide a benefit to members and their existing staff and help to make the State House more diverse and reflective of the communities we all serve. I would be delighted to talk further about this proposal or hear to any feedback or suggestions you might have to help make this a reality.

**What:** A State House Internship Program in collaboration with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.

**Who:** Interns would all be individuals of different ages with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) who are MRC clients/referrals. These individuals would be pre-screened by MRC for the positions and would provide support.

**How the process would work:** Any Member (or office) volunteering to take on an IDD intern placement would notify the Committee on Personnel & Administration. The Member would be provided a standard internship job description (already written) and then be asked to customize it include any particular needs they have in their office. MRC would then find multiple potential internship candidates for each placement.

The Member (or designated contact) would then have opportunity to interview each of the intern candidates and select the best fit. If none of the referred candidates is a match, the Member could go

back to MRC and modify the job description or just decline to move forward at all. Getting practice at the interview process itself is beneficial so there is a benefit regardless.

**What happens after intern is selected?** MRC would work with legislative staff to set up a structured schedule and tasks. After the intern was selected they would follow all the same onboarding processes already established and be expected to follow all required internship policies and procedures just like anyone else.

**What would the interns do?** They would perform a range in duties just like any other intern, i.e. answering phones, filing, data entry, research, drafting letters, special projects, etc. Just like other interns there may be some candidates who can take on more advanced tasks, and other who may be more limited. The Member can specify in their job description any particular tasks they need help with to ensure that potential candidates fit the criteria.

**What supervisory obligation does the Member have?** Exactly the same as with any other intern. After the onboarding process there would be a simple form to complete, but that is the only additional item.

**Stipend:** This is a paid internship. The interns are paid through MRC, through their existing line item. No additional appropriation is needed and the interns would not be considered House (or Senate) employees. We are simply opening the doors of the State House to an existing program that provides work experience benefits to IDD individuals.

**How does payment work?** Interns would be paid through an established third party employment agency. MRC would pay the temporary employment agency, to avoid any conflict of a state office paying another state office. This model is already in place and has been used successfully by MRC in various other state agencies such as DCAMM, HRD, EOHHS, DAS, EEC, DDS, MOD.

**Length of Internship:** The Internship would last for a period up 240 hours. This would typically range over a period of 8 to 24 weeks, depending on the schedule of the individual and the needs of the Member office. After the end of the internship, there would be no expectation of any permanent position.

We of course hope that some of these internships would lead to later employment, either in the same office or perhaps elsewhere, but in any case the experience gained here is invaluable. Speaking from my own experience, every legislative aide I have had started off as an intern either for me or another legislator. Opening this door further can only serve to benefit many talented and hardworking individuals who may have a disability that has prevented them from such opportunities in the past.

**What if the internship placement does not work out?** Just as with any internship there are times when it's not a good fit. In the unlikely event that an IDD internship placement was not working out and could not be remedied, MRC would step in and the internship would end without any further obligation. We don't expect this to be an issue, but we do want to alleviate any concerns that Members might have at the outset.

**Next Steps:** Once any internal matters are resolved, we would propose to have the MRC come in to the State House for a briefing in Member's Lounge to advertise the program and answer questions or concerns. Ideally we would have a dozen or so offices volunteer to participate as a pilot program starting in February.

# Appendix C-2



## State House Internship Program for Persons with Disabilities

State House internships can provide valuable work experience, open doors to future employment and light the spark of public service and civic engagement that can last a lifetime. A paid internship program for MRC Consumers can help candidates get paid experience to pursue a career in public service. It will offer valuable work study opportunities for individuals with disabilities, provide a benefit to members and their existing staffs and help to make the State House more diverse and reflective of the communities we all serve.

### Phase I: Marketing

Phase I will require marketing this program to interested offices at the statehouse. This will be accomplished by presenting to state offices using the job-description available and identifying needs. We would also need to market internally to potential candidates and complete vetting according to best practices.

### Phase II: Screening

Candidates will be screened internally and then their materials will be presented to state offices that have identified a need for interns. The office will then interview candidates and any Member (or office) interested in taking on an intern placement would notify the Committee on Personnel & Administration or their designee. If selected MRC would write up an OJE agreement with ACE Employment Services Inc. and assist the candidate in getting any Statehouse credentials needed. Account managers will ensure all stakeholders are able to proceed smoothly and provide ongoing support during the internship while reporting back to the consumer's placement personnel.

#### Qualifications for screening:

- Interns must be a minimum of 16 years of age; or 15 with work authorization from their high school.
- Ability to work within regular business hours of 9:00am to 5:00pm
- Ability to operate in a professional office environment. Interns are regularly required to sit, walk and stand; communicate with others both in person and by telephone; use hands repetitively to finger, handle, or operate standard office equipment; may occasionally lift up to 10 pounds.

### Phase III: Placement

Once interviewed and placed, the internship start date, hours and duration will be negotiated. The idea of is to place MRC candidates in roles to provide support according to their skill sets and allow them to participate in real-life projects for the commonwealth and create a pathway to employment with state government. Selected candidates are taken on for 37.5 hours a week for 6 weeks at a rate of \$12/hr (Ace Employment is the third-party payroll company utilized and they get paid \$16.62/hr) but we can extend beyond six weeks if we specify less than 37.5 hours a week in the contract; not to exceed 240 hours total.

- Account manager will oversee that OJE contracts, ACE paperwork, statehouse internship paperwork are all completed
- Account manager will follow up with statehouse liaison on a weekly basis

- Placement staff will follow up with consumers on a weekly basis


Steps to move forward:

1. Outline the scope and objective of the program. This is a program to qualified individuals with disabilities the opportunity to prove their skillset in a government/administrative setting. As we currently view it, this program will borrow heavily from the existing program with the Mass Office of Diversity (MOD) and Equal Opportunity but open up other opportunities within the Greater Boston area other constituents outside of this arena. The current program with MOD places candidates from MRC in roles to provide support according to their skill sets but allows them to participate in real-life projects for the commonwealth and create a pathway to employment with state government. Selected candidates are taken on for 37.5 hours a week for 6 weeks at a rate of \$12/hr (Ace Employment is the third-party payroll company utilized and they get paid \$16.62/hr).
2. Identify current needs of state reps for admin support roles and draw up job descriptions based on those needs. This will determine whether it's a full-time 6-week position or a longer part-time opportunity.
3. Have MRC staff present to state representatives to market the program but also to reiterate the objective and scope of the program.
4. identify locations, and solidify screening standards for candidates based on job description provided.
5. Develop a projected start date, begin recruitment, and refer candidates to be interviewed for this opportunity. We will then review OJE requirements and evaluation standards with identified worksites.
6. MRC and the state representatives will have to develop a "First Day of Work" document to let them know who to contact should they have any needs or questions, outline expectations, and provide instructions in regard to getting paid and other logistics.





COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES & PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



**WorkAbility Subcommittee**  
**2019-2020: Final Report**