



## FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.

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### Employment First

**The Council promotes a statutory foundation for the Governor's Executive Order for the Employment First initiative. This would provide guidance and support for the strategic action implementation plan developed by the Employment First Collaborative Team and Employment Partnership Coalition and agreed to by nine state agencies and organizations in an interagency cooperative agreement.**

Employment First is a declaration of both philosophy and policy stating that integrated employment is the first priority and preferred outcome for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), and defined as individual employment paid by an employer at minimum wage or greater or earnings through one's self-employment business that is fully integrated in the community workforce with a goal of maximum self-sufficiency.

To fully implement Employment First in Florida as intended by Executive Order 13-284 and to support the Interagency Cooperative Agreement executed in 2014, legislation must authorize the prioritization of competitive employment for individuals with disabilities and ensure that related statutes, policies and procedures are sufficient or revised to prioritize employment.

During 2013-14, the Council led Florida's Employment First efforts, which include stakeholder groups ranging from the grassroots level to agency administrators, presidents and chief executive officers. Nine state agencies and organizations executed an interagency cooperative agreement using the successful elements of high performing states framework. These partners have also developed a strategic action implementation plan and set targets for improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The partners are also working collaboratively to act on the recommendations of the Governor's Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities. Legislative action will guide the state in this meaningful multi-agency effort to strengthen implementation of Employment First in Florida.

Strategies for Employment First include transition to work programs that successfully assist youth as they age out of education settings and prepare to seek, gain and maintain meaningful employment. We can ensure that there is an expectation of Employment First for a new generation and shift funding emphasis to incentivize employment as the first option for employers and providers.

Another strategy addresses the number one barrier cited to maintaining employment: transportation. It is imperative that Florida prioritize transportation for employment if these efforts are to be successful. One method might be to subsidize the existing Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) boards and require a certain percentage of their allocation be spent exclusively on transportation for employment or that a specific funding amount is designated for employment trips for individuals with disabilities.

States that haven't adopted Employment First policies have been encouraged to do so by the National Governor's Association's report; *A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities*. This report indicates that states with Employment First policies tend to achieve better employment outcomes. Currently, the highest performing state with an Employment First policy has an employment rate of 87% for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Florida, on the other hand, reported a 13% employment rate using the same comparative data source.

We need to strengthen existing legislation that guarantees the prioritization of competitive employment for individuals with disabilities to fully implement Employment First in Florida. Such legislation would support the work that has begun and guarantee that statutes drive policies and procedures. We must also ensure transportation is available for the purposes of employment.