



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 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 integrated employment for individuals with disabilities and ensure that related statutes, policies and procedures are sufficient or revised to prioritize employment.

During 2014-15, the Council continued to lead 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. Legislative action will guide the state in this meaningful multi-agency effort to strengthen implementation of Employment First in Florida.

The Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) became effective July 1, 2015. passed by Congress and signed by the President last year, it replaces the 16 year old Workforce Investment Act (WIA) as the primary governmental employment and training system. The WIOA system will also place more emphasis on assisting youth with disabilities. The law has several new requirements including the provision that states will reserve 15% of their Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) allotment to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities. In addition, the law creates a new section of WIOA that requires VR agencies to coordinate with the school systems to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services for students with disabilities.

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

We need legislation that upholds the promise of competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities to fully implement Employment First in Florida; such legislation would support the work that has begun and guarantee that statute drives future policies and procedures.