



STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
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PAUL R. LEPAGE  
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COMMISSIONER

February 28, 2018

Senator Amy Volk, Chair  
Representative Ryan Fecteau, Chair  
State of Maine 128<sup>th</sup> Legislature  
Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development

Re: Employment First Maine Coalition Report and Recommendations

Dear Senator Volk, Representative Fecteau and Committee Members:

In the letter dated January 18, 2018 requesting an update on our efforts related to Public Law Title 26, Chapter 41, The Employment First Maine Act the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education are jointly providing the attached report.

The report highlights some of the many employment activities underway, including those which address recommendations identified in the Employment First Maine Coalition's final report submitted to The Labor Committee on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

The Departments appreciate the Committee's support of the employment of people with disabilities in Maine and efforts across the state by individuals with disabilities, families, the business community, educational systems, advocacy groups, and service provider agencies, to achieve the vision of The Employment First Maine Act. Together, we know that preparing and supporting this untapped workforce and the employers who need them is important for Maine.

Sincerely,

John Butera  
DOL Commissioner

Ricker Hamilton  
DHHS Commissioner

Robert Hasson  
DOE Commissioner

Enclosure

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February 2018

**FOR THE LEGISLATURE'S JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON LABOR, COMMERCE, RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**UPDATE – IMPLEMENTATION OF EMPLOYMENT FIRST MAINE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services are committed to achieving the policy vision and goals established in the Employment First Act; improving the outcomes for persons with disabilities in Maine; and enhancing the effectiveness of publicly funded services in supporting those employment outcomes.

Since reviewing the Employment First Maine Coalition report in May 2017, the Departments have continued the collective focus on the employment of people with disabilities in Maine, which align with the recommendations identified by the Coalition. The Departments recognize that successful implementation of the Employment First Maine Act must also include people with disabilities, their families, the business community, educational systems, advocacy groups, and service provider agencies. The Departments reaffirm the commitment to work together with these entities as part of a comprehensive plan to make employment the “first and preferred” service or support option offered to individuals with disabilities in Maine and to convene a stakeholder forum at least annually to ensure that the forward momentum of Employment First continues.

Below are highlights of some of the Departmental efforts that are underway. Although there is still much to be done, these address many of the recommendations in the Employment First Maine Coalition report, including encouraging the expectation of employment for those served; preparing young people with disabilities for adulthood and competitive employment; expanding the professional expertise of providers engaged by the Departments; and engaging the business community.

**I. JOINT AGENCY COOPERATIVE INITIATIVES**

**A. Promote Employment for All:**

- The number of individuals with disabilities has been reduced to less than 50 people (from approximately 220 in 2010) statewide being paid subminimum wage by the end of 2017. Each individual was afforded career counseling under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation at the Maine Department of Labor during July 2017. The career sessions provided information about available services to assist them to move to integrated employment at or above minimum wage. The result of the career counseling sessions is that approximately 80%

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of the individuals involved in the sessions decided that they wanted to apply to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and work with a counselor to find employment in their communities where they would earn minimum wage or better.

- DHHS and MDOL continued our close work with Clubhouses around the state; this model provides an environment and opportunities for individuals with significant barriers to employment due to mental illness to regain employment skills and access resources that assist them on a pathway to employment. Accordingly, a new service was developed and implemented for individuals with Acquired Brain Injuries to assist them on return to work and the option of attending a Work Ordered Day Club House became a reality in the fall of 2017 with the first opening in southern Maine. DHHS also continued to support the Mental Health Psychosocial Clubhouse model by providing grant funding for non-MaineCare eligible individuals to participate in the service and providing partial funding for the development of expanded availability of services into the Bath/Brunswick/Topsham areas.
- Jointly DHHS, MDOL and Social Security Administration funded work and benefits counseling to encourage individuals to pursue employment; Year 2 of the Work and Benefit Navigator training was offered, reaching an additional 100 people with information, resources, and technical support. These day-long sessions provide necessary information for professionals, families, and agency staff to be able to challenge the myths that arise around work and benefits. Maine Medical Center, Vocational Services in conjunction with the Departments held six sessions throughout the State and continues to provide technical support to the 250-plus people who have participated. Additionally, a new advanced training for Employment Professionals on Work and Benefit Navigation will occur in April 2018.

The Department of Education also partnered with the Maine Medical Center (MMC) and provided funding for MMC's work to develop a Work and Benefits Navigator Service Capacity for use in two pilot schools in Maine. This initiative involves development of training and materials specific to educator roles and needs, development of a presentation for school personnel to use with others, and technical consultation. This program also provides individualized benefits counseling services at the schools and participates in family outreach events coordinated by the school. Additionally, it provides new resources to conduct transition planning and services and promotes and disseminates resources for families about the transition process. As part of the Work and Benefits Navigator Training, the Department-sponsored training also includes income reporting, tax preparation services and asset development, disability-related

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work expenses, and housing work incentives.

**B. Transition of Youth with Disabilities to Adulthood:**

- The Maine Department of Labor, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and Department of Education, Office of Special Services, have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) aimed at both individual and shared agency responsibilities across our systems to improve employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. The MOU functions as a guiding tool as we develop protocols for services to transition age youth with disabilities that are based on best practices and lead to post-secondary education, training and employment upon graduation. The two Departments have continued to provide cross-training for our staff, and outreach to families about the resources available.
- In order to increase resources devoted to employment supports and services for individuals with disabilities and provide information and processes to transition age youth, the Department of Education has collaborated with DVR in order to provide a collection of resources (“resource notebook”) for schools as part of students’ transition planning and training, which will assist in a student’s transition from high school to post-secondary education, training or employment. This collection is revised and disseminated annually.

**C. Professional Development for Service Providers:**

- DHHS, MDOL and DOE expanded the Employment Workforce Development System to provide employment resources and training to individuals supporting youth with disabilities. The sessions were developed to assist state personnel, families, and educators with learning about best practices that promote employment and the benefits of work for transition-age youth.
- In conjunction with DHHS Employment staff, MDOL provided training for case managers, care coordinators and VR staff around the state regarding the creation of a culture of employment across our services and updates to MaineCare and VR rules. The training was geared to support the development of knowledge and skills among provider staff to increase focus on supporting individuals’ employment goals and how staff across our agencies can work more closely to encourage and promote employment goals and outcomes for our mutual consumers.

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**D. Employer Engagement:**

- Provided resources for the Maine Business Leadership Network (Me-BLN), an affiliate of the United States Business Leadership, to promote business-to-business encouragement, support, and resources around the hiring of employees with disabilities in Maine. Housed at The Maine State Chamber of Commerce, the Me-BLN continued to provide a platform for Maine businesses to have support and connections to resources to integrate their workforce. In 2018-2019 the Me-BLN will offer Campus Career Connect to pair business volunteers with college students with disabilities in Maine to assist students with reaching their career goals.

**II. DEPARTMENT SPECIFIC INITIATIVES**

**A. Department of Education**

The Maine Department of Education-Office of Special Services initiated several projects that are designed to promote integration and support for people with disabilities as they transition into the workforce. Specifically, the following initiatives were developed to promote the employment of youth with disabilities:

- The Department provides in-person training regarding transition planning for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) development to 30-40 schools on an annual basis.
- The Maine Department of Education is required to report annually to the federal government the results of data collected on post-school outcomes for the cohort of individuals with disabilities who either graduated or otherwise exited the school setting during the most recently completed academic year. In past years, the Department has had difficulty collecting meaningful data because of the lack of a common identifier such as a social security number. The Department has employed two contractors to call every student who exited Maine's schools in the 2016-17 school year. This survey will give all state agencies critical information about post-school experiences of students with disabilities.
- The Department has engaged the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition for programming entitled Translating Evidence to Support Transitions (TEST). This new programming, which is designed to improve the outcomes of youth with psychiatric disabilities through best practice transition planning, is in use at four pilot districts. Three separate curricula support post-secondary transition planning and involve the practices of student-led IEP transition planning, career and technical education, and

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community partnerships. The Department has sponsored this work in order to ensure that IEPs include quality employment-focused goals, including increasing readiness for employment and self-supportive choice. Fifteen districts will be trained by early 2018. The next steps include scheduling coaching and implementation support during the first few months of 2018.

- Finally, in its efforts to continue developing and promoting best transition resources, including resources for families about transition and employment in Maine, the Department receives technical assistance and collaborates with other states regarding current and transition practices through National Technical Assistance Center for Transition (NTACT).

### **B. Department of Health and Human Services**

The Department of Health and Human Services Offices of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, Child and Family Services, and Aging and Disability Services have committed to work together to ensure that the outcome of employment of people with disabilities is a strong focus of the services we provide. During the past year, the Department has created new resources, developed additional employment services, and begun to expand expectations that we all have a responsibility to promote employment as the *first and preferred* outcome. Specifically, the Department has undertaken the following additional actions to promote employment of people with disabilities:

- Expanded Career Planning Services to include individuals served by the Other Related Conditions Home and Community Based (HCBS) waiver. These services are now available to people served through all HCBS waivers. Career Planning can assist a person with exploring interests and skills that can improve the outcome of gaining and maintaining successful employment.
- Created employment resources to be included in every Intake and Eligibility packet provided during the initial meeting with a person and their family applying for Intellectual Disability and Autism services. The resources include an employment planning worksheet, a pathway to employment visual, and information on employment services available to assist the individual. All Intake and Eligibility staff have been asked to start the conversation about employment expectations at this first meeting.
- Provided training for case managers, care coordinators, residential staff, and peer specialists regarding the creation of a culture of employment within services provided.

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The training is geared to support the development of knowledge and skills among provider staff to increase focus on supporting individuals' employment goals.

- Set performance measures in behavioral health services agreements including community support services, residential services, and peer centers focused on activities supporting employment; and provide MaineCare members, the public, and other stakeholders information on Behavioral Health Home providers success in linking people to community engagement and employment activities. By reporting publicly on the aggregate employment status of Behavioral Health Home services, the Department seeks to improve provider accountability and quality of care while ensuring individuals have the information needed to make informed behavioral health care decisions.
- Partnered with youth, families, State of Maine agencies, private agencies, and other community members to publish, *High School and Beyond: A Guide to Transition Services in Maine*, through the Office of Family and Children Services. This Guide was developed to assist youth with disabilities, and their families, in planning for a successful transition to adulthood. It provides guidance for youth and their supports in creating a quality transition plan, and provides valuable information about accessing community-based resources including information on employment.
- Partnered with key community-based organizations through Maine LEAP (Learn to Earn and Achieve Potential) to provide employment support to youth from foster care who would otherwise be disengaged from work or postsecondary education. Maine LEAP provides training and follow-up supports to youth to help them develop a pathway to success by teaching them essential work skills, by supporting them in finding and keeping a job, and by helping them plan for their future career success. Maine LEAP was established as a result of a federal Social Innovation Fund Grant awarded to the Maine Youth Transition Collaborative (MYTC), a public/private partnership aimed at improving outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

### **C. Department of Labor**

The Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) continuously seeks ways to improve the employment outcomes of people with disabilities in Maine. In addition to the many joint initiatives described above, MDOL has created new resources, developed additional employment services, and begun to expand expectations that we all have a responsibility to promote employment as the *first and preferred* outcome. Specifically, the MDOL has undertaken the following actions to promote employment of people with disabilities:

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- **Progressive Employment** – The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has completed Phase I of a pilot of the Vermont-developed Progressive Employment. Progressive Employment is a dual customer (employer/jobseeker) initiative that introduces employers to a new generation of workers through offering transition-age youth a range of experiences, including job tours, job shadows, paid work experiences and on-the-job training.
  
- **Transition Work Based Learning Model Demonstration** is in Year 2 of a five-year grant. In partnership with Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG), students with disabilities that are within two years of graduation from high school will be offered employment services to test whether a model of work-based learning improves attainment of competitive integrated post-secondary employment and education outcomes. Specifically, under the grant, JMG is expanding its services to five new high schools in the Bangor area and DVR is now able to offer Progressive Employment services in the Augusta and Bangor regions.
  
- **Summer Work Experience** - DVR and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) offered over 200 students and youth innovative summer employment opportunities in 2017. Students developed job related and specific work skills and many earned their first paycheck. These summer work programs engaged universities, schools, county/ town offices, restaurants, recreation centers, hotels, hospitals, retail stores, florists, farmers, and more. This initiative helped to support the goal of ensuring that all students have a paid work experience before high school graduation.
  
- **Pre-Employment Transition Services** – Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), DVR and DBVI are charged with providing five new services to students ages 14-21. Both divisions are working with partners to launch some innovative opportunities for these youth including:
  - Peer Mentoring - Through a contract with Alpha One, seven schools in southern Maine have used peer mentors to teach soft skills to students during both the school year and as a complement to summer employment programs. Additionally, Alpha One has created a series of videos on topics for use by youth around the state on topics ranging from disability disclosure to financial literacy
  - Aroostook Adult Education – DVR will be contracting with the consortium of Aroostook Adult Education agencies to offer Pre-Employment Transition Services to students in the County. This will include delivery of curriculum, as well as activities in the community.
  - Workplace Readiness Bootcamp – Through a contract with Goodwill NNE, DVR will offer Belfast-area students the opportunity to gain skills through



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participation in Goodwill's Workplace Readiness Bootcamp model, as well as other Pre- Employment Transition Services.

- Learning Independence, Fun and Employment (LIFE) 101 and LIFE 201 are programs at Southern Maine Community College in Portland. Two & three week residential programs immerse students in practicing organization, home management, vocational awareness, independent travel, self-advocacy, and social skills. These DBVI programs include explicit instruction, community based instruction, volunteer opportunities, and paid work experiences.