

# EmploymentFirstMaine

## Policy & Legislation Work Group

### Recommendations from Survey Results

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Every person. Every talent. Every opportunity.

## **Introduction**

A survey was developed by the Policy and Legislation Work Group, a subcommittee of the Employment First Maine coalition. The survey was intended to identify barriers and develop solutions to overcoming those barriers in the effort to obtain meaningful, integrated employment opportunities for Mainers with disabilities. The key recommendations resulting from this survey, along with the information provided by the EFM coalition membership, will form the basis for the coalition's policy work as we move ahead and will be the basis of policy and legislative work the coalition pursues as part of our mandate. The whole EFM Coalition will have to identify priorities for policy and legislative reform and determine which priorities can and should be addressed in years one, two and three.

## **Survey Questions**

- Question 1.** Please identify your role or roles in this work.
- Question 2.** What would you identify as the three top barriers to promoting the goals of accessible, integrated employment for people with disabilities here in Maine?
- Question 3.** In addition to the barriers you mentioned above, are you aware of any other specific legislation, policies, rules or regulations that act as a deterrent or barrier to promoting employment for people with disabilities here in Maine? If yes, please describe the issue.
- Question 4.** Based on your experience with these challenges and barriers, what would you recommend for policy changes or other solutions to these problems? What are your ideas for removing these barriers to integrated, customized employment?
- Question 5.** Have you found techniques or creative "work-around" strategies that were effective in adapting to systemic barriers and succeeded in gaining access to employment services for people seeking your support? If yes, please explain.

**Question 6. As Employment First Maine moves ahead, is there anything we have not asked that you feel the policy committee needs to be aware of?**

**Breakdown of survey respondents**

<b>Identified Role</b>	<b>Percent of total responses</b>	<b>Number of responders</b>
<b>Consumer</b>	<b>8.89%</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Advocate</b>	<b>28.89%</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Employer</b>	<b>4.44%</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>State agency staff</b>	<b>31.11%</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Service provider</b>	<b>22.22%</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Employment services Provider</b>	<b>26.67%</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>13.33%</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Total Respondents:</b>	<b>45</b>	

## **Survey Results by Theme/Category**

Based on the survey results, the Policy Work Group organized the barriers and policy change ideas they received into the three core areas below. Many issues, of course, were raised by more than one respondent. Transportation as a barrier to work, for instance, was raised by a third of the survey respondents. Below are the three themes, followed by the concerns and potential policy solutions respondents raised in each category.

**Barrier 1: The lack of necessary information or knowledge creates barriers to employment for people with disabilities.**

**Barrier 2: The service system has built in barriers, and issues related to funding of services prevent people from working.**

**Barrier 3: Low expectations and stigma around disability are barriers to employment.**

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **Barrier 1. Information/Knowledge**

1. Develop and promote resources for people with disabilities, parents and families regarding accessing proper transition services, what good transition should look like, and how to conduct good employment and career goal setting for young people with disabilities.
2. Develop and promote resources regarding benefits counseling for people with disabilities, families and students as they explore options in transitioning to the world of work as an alternative to living on disability benefits.
3. Develop and promote resources on funding and utilizing adaptive equipment and assistive technology as work supports.

4. Provide a range of professional development and technical assistance to employment support providers on the range of best practices for obtaining employment for people with significant disabilities, including transformational leadership and agency conversion.
5. Educate employers on the skills and potential of people with disabilities, and on the benefits to be had from a diverse work force, particularly in light of labor shortage in Maine. Educate employers on reasonable accommodations in the work place, the ready availability of resources and technical assistance with RA, and the modest (if any) costs associated with RA.
6. Engage in a public awareness campaign promoting the skills, interests and eagerness of people with disabilities to work.

## **Barrier 2. Service System/Funding**

1. Commit Maine's Department of Education to using the innovative "Discovering Personal Genius" model in its transition and career planning process.
2. Develop a system to hold schools accountable for transition outcomes that include employment by the time a student graduates – perhaps a "report card" of sorts.
3. Fund and develop apprentice and practicum experience opportunities for high school students with disabilities. Ensure access to vocational services or job coaching
4. Explore crowd-sourced transportation options, outside-the-box carpooling, and public/private collaboration with small businesses and local schools/service providers.
5. Increase funding for long term employment supports. Consider funding short-term 1-1 staff support to assist a person to integrate into employment - perhaps, for a 3 or 6 month period. Need more flexibility in job support – i.e. when a person doesn't need a job coach but needs other support to maintain long-term employment.
6. Give preference in reimbursement for employment supports rather than day habilitation services. Reform the rate of reimbursement for providers. (It is difficult to get top

notch professionals as employment specialists, and it is difficult to send employment specialists to trainings as the rate does not factor in unbillable time and administrative costs.) Change the 1/4 hour billing system for work support and use the same system as community support. Amend the Section 21 and 29 waivers to address funding disincentives and service caps and limitations on employment support services.

7. Train and support Vocational Rehabilitation and employment specialists to think/visualize/expand outside of their standard procedures, to engage in meaningful discovery and to customize employment rather than limiting available jobs. Provide professional development for Vocational Rehabilitation and employment specialists generally, on how to serve people with significant disabilities.
8. Commit Vocational Rehabilitation and employment specialists generally to increasing transition services to young people with significant disabilities.
9. Eliminate the use of sub-minimum wage provisions in Maine's service system. Phase out small group employment.
10. Amend regulations to give preference to people who want to work over those who don't in terms of waiting lists.

### **Barrier 3. Low Expectations/Stigma**

1. Work with Child Development Services, other child service providers, and child educators to improve the messages families receive when their young children are first entering the service system and to increase expectations for employment and inclusion in the work force for all children.
2. Promote a message, from the Commissioners of DHHS, DOL, and DOE, as well as top management at funded service provider agencies, advocating a strong Employment First orientation.

3. Develop and promote resources on customized employment, highlighting successful employment outcomes that can result from creative, individualized, person-directed planning beyond traditional job development. Use these materials to raise expectations.

*\*\*\*WIOA - Workforce Incentives Opportunity Act, the legislation that funds training and placement for workforce, defines a successful outcome as full-time (40 hour) employment. Changing that definition for emerging target populations would enable access to federally funded workforce programs by PWD. Currently, if the individual can't convince the Case Manager/Center Manager that their disability in itself does not prevent them from working 40 hours/week, they are not candidates for enrollment in publically funded workforce programs. This is evidenced by the (lack of) numbers of PWD being served in the federally funded workforce system.*