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**MAINE JOBS COUNCIL**  
**COMMISSION ON DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT**  
**Mel Clarrage, Chair**

**2011 ANNUAL REPORT**

**Submitted to Legislature: September, 2011**

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**Maine Jobs Council  
Commission on Disability and Employment**

**2011 Recommendations to the Governor and Legislature**

Formerly known as the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, the Commission was established by the Legislature in 1997 to promote collaboration between the public and private sectors to increase awareness and influence policy that increases the opportunities for employment for people with disabilities. Its members envision a Maine workforce that includes all people with disabilities employed in jobs that meet both their economic and personal needs.

The Commission's primary function is to advise the Governor and Legislature on issues related to disability and employment. The current membership is committed to implementing our statute and serving as a key advisor to the Governor and the Legislature on increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities in Maine. The Commission's outreach to all respective organizations, and agencies directly concerned with the welfare of persons with disabilities, generates information of critical importance to the executive branch of state government in maximizing cross-departmental resources and pursuing available federal funding to increase the number of persons with disabilities who are competitively employed in an integrated setting.

In 2010/11, the CDE has reviewed data from state agencies providing employment services to people with disabilities and has discussed policies, practices, and societal/cultural issues that impact the employment rate for people with disabilities. In 2008 (the latest year for which data was available), the employment rate of working-age people with disabilities in ME was 39.5 percent, while the employment rate of working-age people without disabilities in ME was 81.4 percent. The gap between the employment rates of working-age people with and without disabilities was 41.9 percentage points. This difference is above the national average.

The bottom line: **The employment rate of Maine people with disabilities is unacceptable.**

The CDE has identified three primary conditions that stand in the way of increasing the number of persons with disabilities who are employed.

- Beliefs about the ability of people with disabilities to be successfully employed and to perform the essential functions of a job.
- The beliefs of individuals with disabilities about their own skills and ability to be successfully employed.
- Public service system issues that contribute to both of the above.

What needs to happen:

- I. The rate of employment for people with disabilities in Maine must increase.
- II. Work must be done to inform employers and people with disabilities themselves that work is possible and encouraged, and that there are resources available to help along the way if needed.
  - a. Develop and implement a plan to encourage employment self-advocacy for people with disabilities; show people with disabilities that competitive work in an integrated setting is possible and supported.
  - b. Utilize social media and public education campaign strategies.

- c. Continue to partner with public and private sectors on business-to-business initiatives between DOL, DHHS, and the Maine Chamber of Commerce. This could include presentations at business oriented forums to demonstrate that:
  - i. qualified skilled individuals with disabilities are available to work, and
  - ii. there are employer-friendly resources available to work through any issues that may arise.
  
- III. The outcome of special education and the focus of the system that provides services and supports to people with disabilities must be shifted to emphasize employment and self sufficiency as the ultimate goal for recipients of service.
  
- IV. The existing employment service system driven by state and federal resources must develop, implement, and enforce quality assurance consistently across the system. Key recommendations for 2012:
  - a. Identify and define key data elements (what is a successful outcome?) for comparable reporting from all agencies funding employment services to people with disabilities.
  - b. Create a mechanism by which the implementation of the DHHS Employment Policy and OAMHS/OACPD Practice Guidelines are monitored at the DHHS Office and provider agency levels, including the close examination of the use of subminimum wage certificates.
  - c. Ensure that providers of employment services (job coaches and employment specialists) obtain and maintain skills to effectively work with service recipients *and* the business community.
  - d. Bring Maine into compliance with the federal mandate that all transition-aged youth have a work experience.<sup>1</sup>
  - e. Ensure that all individuals with disabilities have access to the resources of Maine's general workforce development services.

The Commission endeavors to maintain a dialog with the Executive Branch by sharing critical information related to employment of people with disabilities.

Thank you for your support. For further information on the work of the Commission on Disability and Employment, please go to our website at [www.maine.gov/labor/mjc/committees/disabilities](http://www.maine.gov/labor/mjc/committees/disabilities), or contact the Chair, Mel Clarrage, at the Disability Rights Center, at 207-626-2774, extension 221.

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<sup>1</sup> Employability skills and self-sufficiency, along with item IV. d., are not mandated by standards, standards-based curriculum, or measured by any type of assessment; there is no accountability for educators and administrators to ensure students are sufficiently prepared.