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MAINE JOBS COUNCIL
COMMISSION ON DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT
Mel Clarrage, Chair
2010 ANNUAL REPORT

Submitted to Legislature: September 2010

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**Maine Jobs Council
Commission on Disability and Employment
2010 Recommendations to the Governor and Legislature**

Envisioning a future in which all who want to work, can work...

Equality for people with disabilities is about having equal opportunities to live life to its fullest potential: to earn a good living, to follow a passion, to make a difference. We all must have the opportunity to attain and sustain employment, which is so central to our quality of life. What we do for work determines where we live, what we own, and whether or not we can save for retirement or send our children to college. Work also informs our sense of self and contributes to the social fabric of our lives.

The Commission on Disability and Employment works toward the goal of full opportunity for people with disabilities who work or want to work. The Commission envisions a future in which people with disabilities have jobs that meet their economic and personal needs -- a future in which there is fair treatment of workers with disabilities and full support for their endeavors.

In this year's annual report, readers can learn about the Commission, the work it has supported, and its recommendations for actions that will bring us closer to this vision for the future.

The CDE: Fostering Opportunity for Workers with Disabilities

The Commission on Disability and Employment is made up of experts, advocates, and concerned citizens from the public and private sectors. Fifty-eight percent of its members are people who identify themselves as having a disability.

The Commission, which was created by state law, facilitates conversations, events, outreach, and advocacy among different organizations and community members. As a subcommittee of the Maine Jobs Council, the Commission works hard to integrate disability issues into the broader workforce development initiatives of the Council. The Commission promotes collaboration between the public and private sectors, and it serves as a central hub to the many entities with similar goals serving the needs of, and advocating for, a workforce inclusive of people with disabilities. The work of the Commission is guided by *Working Together: Maine's Strategic Plan to Maximize the Employment of People with Disabilities*—a long-term plan created in 2006 through collaboration and with the insight of many conversations with employers, service agency personnel, and people with disabilities. The plan can be found at: <http://choices.muskie.usm.maine.edu/plan/>.

An important job of the Commission is to report to the Governor, the legislature, and Maine's residents on the "state-of-the-state" of disability and employment in Maine and to make recommendations for improvement.

The remainder of this report describes the CDE recommendations for the coming year, which we feel should increase the employment opportunities for Maine residents with disabilities.

◆ **Change reporting / organizational structure of the Commission as it relates to the Maine Jobs Council and the Governor's Office.**

Formerly known as the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, the Commission's primary function is to advise the Governor and Legislature on issues related to disability and employment. The Committee was absorbed into the larger Maine Jobs Council in 1998, which removed the Commission's ability to directly advise the Governor on issues related to disability and employment. The Commission on Disability and Employment (CDE) recommends restructuring the hierarchy in one of the following ways:

- Legislative action could be taken to re-institute a direct reporting function to the Governor's Office, OR
- CDE could be represented in a regular meeting with other MJC committees' leadership and the Governor.

◆ **Lead the way for Maine's business community.**

The recent past has been a challenging time for individuals seeking employment; however, labor market predictions show that in the coming years, Maine's workforce will be retiring at a pace too brisk for the existing labor pool to replace. This workforce shortage should create opportunities for individuals that may be seen as "nontraditional" employees, including individuals with disabilities.

The CDE recommends that the State now demonstrate that individuals with disabilities are a valued and valuable part of Maine's workforce, with renewed commitment to activities demonstrating its performance as a Model Employer. The State can set the stage for all Maine employers to recognize that this group of individuals is a talented labor pool that is able to meet the needs of businesses. To that end, in 2006, Governor John Elias Baldacci signed an Executive Order charging the State as an employer to take the lead on employing Mainers with disabilities.

◆ **Ensure access to appropriate health care for working people with disabilities.**

Access to health care is crucial for people with disabilities, including those individuals who are employed. In order for the Department of Health and Human Services to provide coordinated and equitable access to health care for working individuals with disabilities, the CDE recommends that the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services create a study group to:

- examine all MaineCare programs which support individuals with disabilities, including Medicaid waivers, and
- explore what may be possible under the Workers with Disabilities Option to enhance incentives for Mainers with disabilities as they gain employment.

This group, which should include Ticket to Work community partners from the Disability Rights Center and Maine Medical Center, should submit its findings and recommendations to the CDE by June 30, 2011, which should identify needed changes in state policy to enhance this population's ability to join the workforce.

◆ **Ensure continued focus on post school outcomes for youth with disabilities.**

Students with disabilities are part of tomorrow's workforce. The State of Maine has recognized, in statute, the importance of supporting students as they become adult workers by requiring the Departments of Corrections, Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor to coordinate services for youth with disabilities as they transition to employment after completing school. The CDE recommends that the state monitor and report on the effectiveness of this coordinated effort on the employment of young workers with disabilities.

◆ **Maintain or increase funding for the provision of employment services for people with disabilities.**

Statistics from Snapshot 2010 indicate that persons with disabilities have added challenges to gain the needed skills to secure employment at a livable wage. Persons with disabilities are three times more likely to live in a household in poverty, are one half as likely to be employed and one third less likely to gain the skills needed for today's job market.

With every Maine Department of Labor Division of Vocational Rehabilitation general fund dollar cut in the last state budget process, an additional four dollars were lost in available federal matching funds. MaineCare rates to provide support to working individuals with developmental disabilities have been cut. MaineCare waiver services which fund employment supports to individuals with developmental disabilities have been closed to new eligible MaineCare members due to lack of financial resources. The CDE recommends that the state make no further cuts to

these support systems and instead develop additional funding streams for these services which can include:

- Maximizing use of the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program,
 - Identifying Medicaid Waiver options that can support services for eligible individuals with psychiatric disabilities, and
 - Partnering with community agencies to obtain federal grant dollars.
- ◆ **Ameliorate transportation issues that prevent people with disabilities from getting to work.**
People with disabilities often have limited access to the reliable, accessible, and flexible transportation that is a prerequisite to successful employment. In most parts of the State of Maine, transportation requires car travel. People with certain disabilities may be unable to drive, and many others have limited access to a vehicle due to poverty. The availability, accessibility and reliability of public transit and transportation assistance options vary widely across the state. There are also significant gaps in the availability of transportation for non-medical reasons, during evening and weekend hours, and in certain geographic areas, particularly the very rural and across county lines. The CDE recommends that the state develop and implement a coordinated transportation plan that includes the needs of workers with disabilities.
- ◆ **Ensure that all individuals with disabilities have access to the resources of Maine's general workforce development services.**
Many people with disabilities do not require specialty services or supports in order to work. The CDE recommends that the State develop a long term strategy to ensure that resources related to employment of persons with disabilities be fully integrated within all programs and services in Maine's workforce development system. The Commissioner of the Department of Labor should report to the Maine Jobs Council CDE by June 30, 2011 the following:
- The mechanism by which Maine's Workforce Development System tracks disability in its general employment and training programs,
 - A clear explanation of the partnership between job training programs and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, and
 - Recommendations for needed improvements to ensure that Mainers with disabilities have equal access to all services in Maine's Workforce Development System.

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, or contact the Chair, Mel Clarrage, at the Disability Rights Center, at 207-626-2774, extension 221.

