

**GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL
EDUCATION**

**JOINT ALASKA WORK MATTERS TASK FORCE
and EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**

MINUTES

Videoconference Host:

Governor's Council
550 W. 7th Avenue, Suite 1220
Anchorage, Alaska

Meeting Date

Tuesday, January 17, 2023
1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Employment Committee Members:

Nona Safra – Committee Chair
Anna Attla
Charlene Tauffest
Director Duane Mayes

Fred Villa
Jena Crafton
Ken Hamrick
Lyle Downing

Alaska Work Matters Task Force Members:

Director Duane Mayes – Chair
Beverly Schoonover
Bobby Dorton
Jimael Johnson
Karen Ward
Nona Safra

Carol Polito
Eric Gurley
Michael Christian
Robespierre Howard
Rose Muncy

Guests:

Christine Marasigan – Department of Health Commissioner's Office
Corey Gilmore – GCDSE member
Dave Berube – Disability Law Center (DLC)
Commissioner Heidi Hedberg – Department of Health
Heidi Lieb-Williams – GCDSE Chair
Katia Albanese – State Exchange on Employment and Disability (SEED)
Lesley Thompson – Formerly with Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA)
Margaret Evans – GCDSE member
Rita Gray – DVR, Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training (MASST)

GCDSE Staff:

Patrick Reinhart – Co-chair AWMTF
Jamie Kokoszka
Lanny Mommsen
Michael Stevenson

Rich Saville
Sara Lizak
Joshua Petrash
Laurie Hill

Prepared by: Sheila Garrant, Peninsula Reporting

CALL TO ORDER – 1:00 p.m.
ROLL CALL – Quorum established

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflicts of interest were declared.

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

Director Duane Mayes, chair of the Alaska Work Matters Task Force, and Patrick Reinhart, co-chair of the Alaska Work Matters Task Force and executive director of the Governor’s Council, welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Katia Albanese, with the State Exchange Employment Disabilities (SEED), shared a summary of SEED’s involvement with the Alaska Work Matters Task Force.

Recognition of Bobby Silverstein

Director Mayes shared that the Alaska Work Matters Task Force was fortunate to work with Bobby Silverstein as a technical assistant to the state and to have his presence at the Living, Working, and Playing Towards Independence Conference in September. The feedback from the conference confirmed that Bobby Silverstein’s presentation on advocacy was valuable and well-received. Unfortunately, shortly after the conference, Bobby passed away unexpectedly. Director Mayes shared that he had a long history of working with Bobby and considered him a mentor throughout his career.

Patrick Reinhart stated that he also shared a long history with Bobby Silverstein and that Bobby is an icon that will be missed. Bobby helped write the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act). He was tremendously involved as a disability advocate.

Katia Albanese shared that Bobby Silverstein served as a mentor to many advocates, including herself, and he was known nationally for his efforts. He is a legend when it comes to disability policy. She wanted the members to know that Bobby was always excited to work on the Alaska efforts, and he was proud of what had come out of the idea of the task force, from the implementation of it to the recommendations report. Bobby was excited about Alaska’s movement and spoke highly of it. Katia shared that Alaska is serving as a leader, and the efforts do not go unnoticed and are being shared through SEED’s initiatives and others.

Patrick Reinhart recognized the following beneficiary board executive directors, chairs, and Trust staff:

- Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA), Jon Haghayeghi
- Alaska Mental Health Board/Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (AMHB/ABADA), Beverly Schoonover
- Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Michael Christian

- State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee (SVRC) chair, Travis Noah
- Trust Senior Program Officer, Jimael Johnson

ALASKA WORK MATTERS TASK FORCE REPORT OVERVIEW

Director Mayes directed the members' attention to the Alaska Work Matters Task Force Final Report. He noted that the report includes an executive summary of the recommendations.

Brief Overview:

In early 2021, Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy initiated the formation of the Alaska Work Matters Task Force under the umbrella of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE) and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. The directors of the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the GCDSE were named as chair and co-chair, and 22 additional individuals representing state agencies and boards, Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health Trust beneficiaries, employers, and educators were selected to participate.

The purpose of the task force was to review and analyze existing policies, practices, procedures, barriers, and workforce utilization data regarding the employment of people with disabilities in the State of Alaska and prepare a report that includes recommendations to expand and improve employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with disabilities

Director Mayes asked attendees to consider ways to contribute to and support the recommendations in each section. He and Patrick Reinhart reviewed the report as follows:

Section 1: State of Alaska as a Model Employer for Individuals with Disabilities

1. Set utilization goals for state hiring.
2. Increase awareness and utilization of the existing Provisional Hire Program.

Comments:

- *Educate hiring managers statewide that the program exists.*
 - *Recently had meetings with the Division of Personnel and the State Department of Administration, who are adding a significant amount of supervisory training for hiring managers to include provisional hire.*
 - *Managers have opportunities to promote provisional hire before statewide recruitment.*
 - *Suggest strategically increasing awareness one state department at a time.*
3. Establish a centralized accommodation fund (CAF) for state positions.

Comments:

 - *Have received some information from the state on what it would require to establish a CAF.*
 4. Increase state employment for people with the most significant disabilities through support for personal care services.

Comments:

- *Some people with significant disabilities are supported through waiver services, but there needs to be a fund that people can use to support their personal attendant service needs while working for the state.*
5. Ensure that all state of Alaska online platforms are fully accessible.

Comments:

- *There is a policy for full accessibility for all online platforms that needs to be implemented across state government*
6. Educate executive and legislative staff about disability employment trends and data on employment outcomes.

Comments:

- *The recommendation is something the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education is actively involved in with the support of DVR and other partners each legislative session.*

Section 2: Building the Capacity of the Private Sector to Enhance Employment

Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities

1. Build on the existing Business Engagement Services Teams (BEST) to increase collaboration between private sector employers in order to increase diversity and inclusion.

Comments:

- *DVR employs a dual-customer model working to meet the needs of the client and the employer.*
2. Continue planning and implementing job fairs (including virtual and reverse job fairs) to connect employers and job seekers with disabilities.
 3. Increase the number of students with disabilities served by the Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center (AVTEC).

Comments:

- *DVR has invested in AVTEC to elevate and modernize the training facility.*
4. Increase the number of people with disabilities involved in apprenticeships and internships.

Comments:

- *The Alaska Workforce Investment Board is the primary component that will apply for grants to elevate internships and apprenticeships.*
5. Support disability-owned and disabled veteran-owned businesses through procurement and contracting systems.

Comments:

- *Support incentive programs to assist veterans in being able to own businesses through procurement and contracting with the State of Alaska.*
6. Reduce hiring barriers for job seekers with justice system involvement.

Comments:

- *Two-thirds of the people currently serving time are Alaskans with disabilities, and the majority of them have a mental illness or substance abuse issue. The Department of Labor needs to do more to assist those Alaskans returning to the community with employment by getting into correctional facilities in advance to begin planning.*

- *Suggestion that the reentry statewide coalitions and programs partner with the background check unit.*

Section 3: Employment Services and Support

1. Strengthen State support for Employment First.

Comments:

- *The subminimum wage authority was repealed in June 2022.*

2. Strengthen implementation of the state Medicaid plan and waivers to better support employment services and outcomes.

Comments:

- *The dialogue must continue with the State SDS and DVR on what needs to be done to create supports that eliminate hindrances for people with disabilities to go to work.*

3. Expand the use of the Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) model for people with mental health conditions or substance use disorders.

Comments:

- *The ISP model is new for people with behavioral health and substance abuse disorders. It is well supported within the DOH, DBH, and the Trust.*
- *There was an open house on the ISP model at the Trust, and leadership from DVR attended the event.*
- *Suggest increasing supported living for people who can live independently but may need minor support.*

4. Improve transportation policies to require options that are reliable and accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Comments:

- *Perennial issue. Many individuals with disabilities do not drive or lack the opportunity to have vehicles.*

5. Support rural traditional skill development such as subsistence and self-employment.

Comments:

- *The rural skills curriculum development has completed several components as part of the Living Well Project.*
- *A presentation on rural traditional skill development is scheduled at the Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference (ASSEC) in February.*
- *Suggest hobby shops as a means to developing skills for self-employment, including for pre-release from Corrections.*

Section 4: Preparing for Work and Secondary Transition

1. Expand and improve existing School-to-Work transition resources for school personnel.

Comments:

- *The report has specific recommendations that focus on elevating the transition skill set with special education teachers, including certifications.*

2. Strengthen the At-Risk Youth Initiative.

Comments:

- *The definition of at-risk youth is vague. Some factors clearly put children in the category, including poverty, family instability or dysfunction,*

unstable school environment, poor community resources, and adverse childhood experiences.

- *DOL&WD made the decision to invest in the At-Risk Youth Initiative.*
- *It will be important to include collaboration statewide of entities that contact the at-risk population. Maximizing state resources requires strategic communication with partners.*

Section 5: Stay at Work, Return to Work

1. Improve stay-at-work and return-to-work policies and programs for individuals who become ill or injured on the job.

Comments:

- *When workers can stay in the labor force or return to work after experiencing illness or injury, they can continue earning money and enjoy the self-esteem and other advantages that come from employment.*

2. Support and encourage teleworking where possible and desirable.

Comments:

- *One potential barrier to the expansion of telework in Alaska is that communities and individuals may have limited access to adequate Internet services. In addition, some teleworkers with disabilities may need accommodations provided by their employer to work from home, and employers may not be familiar with their obligations and options to provide those accommodations.*

3. Invest in Post-COVID health and safety planning.

Comments:

- *Learn a lot through the epidemic and carry lessons across the board when talking about employment of people with disabilities.*

4. Support and expand the Senior Employment Initiative

Comments:

- *Senior Employment Initiative, known in Alaska as Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training (MASST), was transferred from the Division of Employment and Training to DVR.*
- *Advantageous timing to address workforce shortages.*

Patrick Reinhart added that he and Director Mayes are willing to speak to audiences about the task force recommendations. He noted that the report is linked on the Governor's Council's website, and hard copies are available at the office.

Katia Albanese shared that several states have started a community of practice, and the work being done in Alaska was mentioned. She noted that the community would love to hear directly about the Alaska Work Matters Task Force report. Katia stated that SEED works with state and local policymakers and has recently engaged with several policymakers interested in the task force's report. SEED would like to coordinate with the task force to share the report.

TIME AND DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next Employment Committee meeting was not scheduled.

PERSONAL STORIES

Patrick Reinhart stated that the Council is always looking for success stories of people with disabilities for its annual report.

GOOD OF THE ORDER AND ADJOURNMENT

Jena Crafton **MOVED** to adjourn, **SECONDED** by Ken Hamrick. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**, and the meeting adjourned at approximately 2:30 p.m.

DRAFT