

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

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

Videoconference Host:

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

Meeting Date

Wednesday, April 19, 2023
3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Attendees:

Nona Safra-Committee Chair
Jena Crafton
Ken Hamrick
Director Duane Mayes
Anna Attla

Guests:

Dave Berube
Jimael Johnson
Mollyanne Rapoza

Staff:

Patrick Reinhart
Jamie Kokoszka
Michael Stevenson
Robert Tasso

CALL TO ORDER – 3:00 p.m.
ROLL CALL – Quorum established

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

Nona Safra welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Introductions, Announcements, and/or Good News

Nona Safra opened the floor for introductions, announcements, or good news.

Nona Safra announced that May 18, 2023 is Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD).

Nona shared that she attended a job fair in Homer, Alaska. She said the event was very informative and would have been an excellent opportunity for the Council to promote employment for people with disabilities. Nona noted that she did not see vendor information related to accessibility and accommodations for employees. She said when she spoke with a DSP agency representative about hiring people with disabilities to do some of the service provision such as companion services, respite care, and chores, they said they had not thought about reaching out to that population. One concern agency reps mentioned was that people with disabilities don't usually have transportation. Nona noted that there is an opportunity for educating service providers on the capability of people with disabilities to be in the service provision sector in various capacities.

Nona Safra shared that she joined the ADA Compliance Board for the City of Homer. She is putting together a presentation for the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development focused on the employment of people with disabilities and the economics of the disability tourism industry. She noted that disability tourism is valued at about \$60B in America, and if a tourist destination is not accessible, it misses a tremendous economic opportunity.

Nona Safra announced that Jena Crafton will be honored at the 40 Under 40 Awards Ceremony on April 21, 2023 at the Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage.

Ken Hamrick reported that the Center for Human Development (CHD) is currently amidst the '23/'24 recruitment for the LEND Program. He shared that CHD has two individuals from Africa coming to CHD on a fellowship through the State Department. They are both interested in specific issues related to disabilities. Ken plans to invite them to sit in on some Employment Committee meetings and the spring Council meeting as observers.

Director Duane Mayes shared that there is a lot of activity in the legislature related to the Alaska Work Matters Task Force (AWMTF) recommendations. He also shared that he and Patrick Reinhart were interviewed by an Alaska Business Magazine reporter

who was intrigued by the work that the AWMTF was doing. The article can be found in the April issue of Alaska Business Magazine.

Jamie Kokoszka shared the following announcements:

- The Council completed the interview process for the program coordinator I position and submitted the preferred candidate to human resources.
- The Trust's stakeholder survey deadline is April 21, 2023.
- Council members, Anna Attla, Jena Crafton, Corey Gilmore, and Heidi Lieb-Williams did a presentation on "I Have Rights" at the Full Lives Conference and received excellent feedback.

Jimael Johnson shared that the Trust is kicking off the FY '25 budget cycle revision process. She encouraged people to take the survey regarding the Trust's priorities and shared the link to the survey.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflicts of interest were declared.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA and MINUTES

Ken Hamrick **MOVED** to approve the meeting agenda as presented, **SECONDED** by Jena Crafton. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**.

Jena Crafton **MOVED** to approve the November 10, 2022 meeting minutes as presented, **SECONDED** by Anna Attla. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**.

Director Duane Mayes **MOVED** to approve the January 17, 2023 meeting minutes as presented, **SECONDED** by Ken Hamrick. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**.

REPORTS

Chair Report

Nona Safra shared that her health is improving, and she appreciated the support from Council staff while recovering.

GCDSE Staff Report

Patrick Reinhart reported that two Council members who also served on the Employment Committee have resigned. Patrick expressed the Council's appreciation to Charlene Taufest and Fred Villa for their service.

Patrick Reinhart reported that the next full Council meeting is scheduled for Thursday and Friday, June 1 - 2, 2023 in Anchorage.

Patrick Reinhart reported that the Council has been meeting with the Disability Benefits 101 (DB 101) contractor CHD and others involved with DB 101 regarding transferring the responsibility of the DB 101 website and contract to CHD starting in June.

Robert Tasso reported that the Disability Policy Summit training day is scheduled for Monday, April 24, 2023. The training is in preparation for the Virtual Hill Day meetings with Senators Murkowski and Sullivan and Representative Peltola.

BUSINESS

Review Year 2 Work Plan - Activities for Years 3 and 4

Jamie Kokoszka led the committee through a review of the committee's year-two work plan. She highlighted the following information:

Year 2 Plan:

Activity 3.1.1

- The BEST Job Fair was postponed until October 2023. This timing does not match the federal fiscal year for the work plan. An alternative activity must be identified to meet the target of the work plan.
 - Suggestions:
 - The joint meeting of the Employment Committee and the Alaska Work Matters Task Force in January was identified as an activity.
 - The AWMTF report interview and subsequent article on the employment of people with disabilities published in the Alaska Business Magazine could be considered an outreach to employers.

Activity 3.1.2

- A semi-annual report was submitted on March 15, 2023, and a final report will be submitted on October 1, 2023.
- Processes are underway to pilot and implement training and awareness about the rural transition program to develop a long-term plan for authentic rural transitions for students with disabilities.

Activity 3.1.3

- Even after significant marketing of the Microenterprise Grant Program to the developmental disability communities, very few applications for Microenterprise grants came from people with developmental disabilities this year.
- Some barriers were identified by providers who advocate for clients they support to apply for the funds, including an archaic process of cutting paper checks to vendors. The Trust is working with Access Alaska and UAA CHD to determine alternative payment methods. Issues related to the difficulty getting products clients need to help with their businesses were also identified.
 - Suggestions:
 - Continue with a concerted effort to keep promoting the Microenterprise Grant Program to the beneficiary group in the upcoming year.

Activity 3.2.1

- The curriculum is developed and posted on the SESA website.

- Training for educators by Rain Van Den Berg took place at the Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference (ASSEC) in February 2023.

Activity 3.2.2

- Rural transition pilot project being developed with CHD.
- There is a need to identify three schools to participate in the project.
- CHD to develop surveys.

Activity 3.2.2

- Training for parents and guardians on the availability of curriculum is scheduled for August/September 2023.

Patrick Reinhart remarked that the activities for year three are essentially the same as year two. The Council will continue with the same efforts to promote employment for individuals with disabilities through the actions identified.

Jamie Kokoszka reported that she will organize year two's goals, objectives, and activities in a user-friendly format and send them to committee members to review for an upcoming vote of approval at the next Employment Committee meeting.

Project SEARCH Updates

Patrick Reinhart reported that there are three Project SEARCH sites, one in Fairbanks, one in the Mat-Su Valley, and one in Anchorage. Patrick appreciated the DVR staff in Anchorage for their efforts supporting Project SEARCH. The Project SEARCH annual graduation will take place on May 24, 2023. The Council was concerned about the Fairbanks Project not having enough students for next year. When there are not enough students for the program, a district cannot justify the expense of putting a special education teacher, a support person, and a job coach in place. However, the DVR staff in Fairbanks, the community rehab provider, the hospital, and the school district have developed a plan for recruitment for the program.

Patrick Reinhart reported that the Council has offered some financial support to send two people from each Project SEARCH site to the Annual Project SEARCH Conference in Milwaukee July 10 - 14, 2023.

Jamie Kokoszka recommended adding Project SEARCH to year three's work plan activities.

BEST Job Fair Symposium Update

Jamie Kokoszka reported that the BEST Job Fair was postponed until October. She said that COVID has changed the landscape for many employers, and they have reported that they do not get enough value from job fairs. Expanding job fairs to include presentations and resources for employers and job seekers and moving from a job fair to a symposium-type event was discussed. Jamie reported that exhibitions that could be offered include options for accessibility, information about the State as a Model Employer (SAME), and pieces from the AWMTF recommendations report. Because the expansion will require more planning, the event was postponed until the fall to allow

time to organize the event. Jamie noted that October is also National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Patrick Reinhart pointed out that most of the work on the symposium is being done by the DVR BEST team, and the Governor's Council supports the efforts where needed.

U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration Grants

Patrick Reinhart reported the following information related to the \$224M U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration Grant:

- Available for innovative demonstration projects focused on the creation of systemic approaches to improve access to pre-employment transition services for children and youth with disabilities.
- Collaboration Efforts with:
 - State vocational rehabilitation agencies
 - State education agencies
 - Local school districts
 - Centers for independent living
 - Can also include other partners like regional employers, chambers of commerce, and institutions of higher education
- Focused on youth ages 13 – 24
- Eligible to Apply:
 - State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies
 - State Educational Agencies

Patrick Reinhart reported that there are approximately 32 potential awards with an average of \$7M over a five-year period. He noted that the Council cannot apply for the grant, but DVR can because they are the state VR agency. Director Mayes and Patrick have had discussions and met with a variety of stakeholder agencies about applying for the grant that is due June 5, 2023. The discussion included activities that fit into the potential utilization of the grant funds, including the rural transition project, support for Project SEARCH, and activities related to people with disabilities going into schools as employment ambassadors.

Director Mayes said that Patrick Reinhart approached him with the grant opportunity. Director Mayes sent a letter of intent to Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to let them know that it is possible that on June 5th, DVR will submit a grant proposal. Director Mayes remarked that winning the grant award would allow the state to do more to prepare youth with disabilities to fill positions that are sitting vacant throughout the state and address other workforce challenges the state is experiencing.

Director Mayes reported that there was a meeting with a group of key stakeholders around the state, the Centers for Independent Living (CILs), the Trust, and a contractor to begin discussing what the project narrative would look like. Director Mayes met with Commissioner Munoz and shared that he will seek her approval to proceed once the narrative is completed. Director Mayes noted that he sees the Council's Employment Committee as a partner in helping to develop the narrative.

Ken Hamrick commented that CHD would be interested in partnering as a post-secondary education transition program for transition-aged youth.

Other

Director Mayes announced that Representative Saddler agreed to sponsor a bill related to the Assistive Technology Loan Fund. The bill supports moving the assistive technology loan fund, approximately \$440,000, from DVR to Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA). ATLA can shore up its loan program, expand its equipment closet, and purchase equipment based on individual needs. Director Mayes asked for a letter of support from the Council. Director Mayes noted that if the bill passes, ATLA will be able to serve more Alaskans with the necessary assistive technology equipment to succeed.

Personal Stories Request

Nona Safra opened the floor to committee members with a story on how the Council's work with employment has positively impacted them or people they know. No stories were shared at the meeting. Nona noted that Council members are encouraged to share success stories that could be included in the reports to state and federal partners.

DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Jamie Kokoszka will contact Employment Committee members about the next meeting date. She expects the committee to meet sometime in late July or early August.

GOOD OF THE ORDER AND ADJOURNMENT

Ken Hamrick **MOVED** to adjourn, **SECONDED** by Anna Attla. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**, and the meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.