

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

**EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**Videoconference Host:**

Governor's Council  
550 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1220  
Anchorage, Alaska

**Meeting Date**

November 21, 2023  
1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

**Attendees:**

Nona Safra, Committee Chair  
Ken Hamrick  
Anna Attla  
Margaret Evans  
Sabrina Richmond  
Corey Gilmore

**Guests:**

Abigail Gurgiolo – Disability Law Center (DLC)  
Deborah Riddle – Department of Early Education and Development (DEED)

**GCDSE Staff:**

Samantha Vetter  
Rich Saville  
Robert Tasso

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

## **WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR**

### **Introductions, Announcements, or Good News**

Nona Safra welcomed attendees to the meeting. She remarked that the committee seems to be progressing on tasks and preparing for the legislative session in Juneau.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS**

No conflicts of interest were declared.

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA and MINUTES**

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

Anna Attla **MOVED** to approve the September meeting minutes as presented, **SECONDED** by Corey Gilmore. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**.

## **REPORTS**

### **Chair Report**

The chair offered no report.

### **GCDSE Staff Report**

Samantha Vetter shared the following information:

- The Alaska Mental Health Trust Comp Plan is being developed for the next five-year period. Council staff forwards input from the various Council committees.
- The Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) has been active, and work is being done through the advisory committee to get the invites sent out to people to work on different parts of the grant that are outlined with goals, objectives, and deliverables. Stakeholders from various sectors will join in to track progress. The DIF grant will provide presentations about the grant for professionals and one at the ASSEC Conference targeting parents/educators.
- Samantha Vetter has visited the Mat-Su Project SEARCH site. Mat-Su Project SEARCH has five students, and Anchorage Project SEARCH has eight. The Council is developing an awareness outreach plan to promote Project SEARCH.
- The Employment Job Fair and Symposium held in October had 32 employers and over 150 people in attendance. It was a successful venture.
- The Special Education Inclusive Practice Award nomination form is available from the Council. The award is given out at the ASSEC Conference.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Change of Employment Committee Chair**

Nona Safra stated that it has been her honor to serve as the committee chair for several years, but the time has come for her to step down. The committee sought a person active in the employment community to be named as chair, and Anna Attla has been chosen as the new committee chair pending Council chair approval. Nona encouraged committee members to join her in the effort to recruit Employment Committee members.

Anna Attla commented that employment is an important issue for people with disabilities, and having a robust committee membership will help move the needle on employment for people with disabilities.

### **Revisit Goals and Objectives**

Samantha Vetter reported that in July the committee worked on wordsmithing one of the work plan goal activities as follows:

- Goal 3, Objective 1, Activity 2:
  - Old language: Collaborate with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) to support the Council's Five-Year Plan through the management and implementation of the Beneficiary Employment Engagement (BEE) plan activities to ensure beneficiaries have greater access to employment, related support services, and accurate resources and information on how paid employment impacts Social Security and other benefits. Complete plan activities and submit an MHTAAR report to AMHTA twice yearly. GCDSE will provide a report to AMHTA two times per year with activity progress.
  - Proposed new language: Collaborate and continue to support employment activities with key partner agencies (AMHTA, DVR, UAA CHD, DEED, GCDSE, and others) to support the Council's Five-Year Plan through the management and implementation of plan activities to ensure beneficiaries have greater access to employment, related support services, and accurate resources and information on how paid employment impacts Social Security and other benefits.

Ken Hamrick **MOVED** to accept the revision to Goal 3.1.2 as presented, **SECONDED** by Nona Safra. Hearing no opposition, the motion **PASSED**.

### **Housing with CISS Committee**

Samantha Vetter reported that the CISS Committee asked the Employment Committee for feedback on a potential housing survey related to Goal 1, Objective 2 of the CISS Committee work plan.

Nona Safra shared that housing challenges related to employment are being addressed in new ways. For example, the Aspen Hotel in Homer built housing for employees because of the shortage of affordable/accessible housing and transportation in Homer. She also read a report on the lack of affordable housing for teachers in California and other states, and the school districts took older buildings and made them into housing for teachers. Nona noted that those models may bear looking into to remove some of the barriers to employment.

Samantha Vetter reported that she and Robert Tasso met with Alaska Housing staff once to get more information on housing in Alaska and housing data. Samantha noted that the National Core Indicator (NCI) survey data was discussed during a conversation about a potential housing survey. However, since Alaska did not meet the sample size to be included in the NCI report, the data contained in the report should be examined with caution. Given that, Robert Tasso reported that given the research already done, the CISS Committee assessed that it doesn't need to do another survey. It can use existing information, including the NCI survey, the 2015 Barriers to Housing Report, and other available data. The CISS Committee also plans to do listening sessions related to housing barriers. Corey Gilmore reported that the CISS Committee intends to create PSAs about housing. Samantha shared data points in the NCI survey where employment and housing intersect. The members briefly talked about a few outstanding statistics, how a lack of choice truly impacts people's lives, and how many people don't know they have choices related to housing and employment.

Ken Hamrick reported that CHD had a contract to work on the NCI interviews for SDS, and they retained the data. CHD staff would be willing to partner on a summary that might be useful moving forward.

Samantha Vetter noted that staff will notify members when the listening sessions are scheduled.

### **Childcare and Employment Comments – Thread Summit 2023 Report**

Samantha Vetter shared a graphic related to childcare shown at the Thread Summit. She highlighted that 51% of families cannot fully participate in the labor force due to the cost, availability, or quality of early care and education services.

### **Presentations and Other News for Employment**

Anna Attla remarked that public transportation is essential for employment. The challenges people with disabilities experience accessing public transportation are very difficult, ranging from routes, timing, maintenance of bus stops, and transportation in and out of hubs. It creates many barriers to utilizing the services. Corey Gilmore agreed and commented that self-employed people also experience those challenges. Sabrina Richmond spoke about the need to speak out about transportation issues. Ken Hamrick noted that the committee is responsible for addressing employment-related transportation statewide.

Samantha Vetter noted that the Centralized Accommodation Fund (CAF) that was vetoed during the last session will be repackaged with more education and brought forward in the next legislative session. The Council's Legislative Committee provided a position paper related to the CAF, which Samantha shared with the attendees.

Samantha Vetter shared a link to the Alaska Work Matters Task Force report recommendations:

<https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/AKWorkMattersReport.pdf>

### **Working for the Next year with DVR for Media and PSA with Jason Caputo**

Samantha Vetter reported that she is working with Jason Caputo from DVR on creating PSAs for DVR and the Governor's Council's focus on employment. She expects that next year they will have a variety of messaging available to disseminate. Samantha led the committee through a review of messaging opportunities as follows:

- Why is employment for Alaskans with disabilities important?
  - When Alaskans with disabilities are employed, they can contribute positively to their communities, pay taxes, and experience meaningful engagement that reduces isolation and promotes health and well-being.
  - Employment is a pathway to independence and financial security for many Alaskans.
  - Employment is an essential part of recovery for many individuals with behavioral health conditions, offering positive impacts on life satisfaction, self-esteem, independence, and symptom reduction.
  - It is important that employment services are flexible to meet the needs of individuals.
  - In 2014, Alaska passed legislation to become an Employment First state. Employment First means that employment in the general workforce should be the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities receiving assistance from publicly funded systems.

Members offered the following comments:

- Work toward encouraging peer-to-peer support, sharing experiences of people in the workplace to those who want to be in the workplace.
- Define what happens when it doesn't happen (DD Vision, Employment First).
- More messaging to Alaska being an Employment First state, which is almost ten years old.
- Also think about rural Alaska for Employment First.
- Message about transition in rural communities
- Messages about DVR/TVR programs and traditional, subsistence, and self-employment opportunities.

Ken Hamrick suggested inviting Jason Caputo to a committee meeting for a shared work session to discuss the opportunities and resources available and look at other messaging.

### **DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

Dates for the Employment Committee meetings are as follows:

- No meeting in December
- January 9, 2024 at 1:00 p.m.
- No meeting in February (Council meeting)
- March undecided
- April 9, 2024 at 1:00 p.m.

Corey Gilmore invited committee members to the CISS Committee meetings.

Samantha Vetter reminded the committee that the winter Council meeting is scheduled for February 13 – 15, 2024 in Juneau.

### **GOOD OF THE ORDER AND ADJOURNMENT**

Margaret Evans **MOVED** to adjourn. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**, and the meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.