



JB Pritzker, Governor

Dulce M. Quintero, Secretary

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DATE: 5/5/26

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Don Harmon, Senate President
The Honorable John F. Curran, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Emanuel "Chris" Welch, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Tony McCombie, House Minority Leader

FROM: Dulce Quintero
Secretary
Illinois Department of Human Services
Dulce M. Quintero
by [Signature]

SUBJECT: **Economic and Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Task Force Annual Report (May 1, 2025- April 30, 2026)**

The Illinois Department of Human Services respectfully submits the **Economic and Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Task Force Annual Report** on behalf of the **Illinois Department of Human Services-Division of Rehabilitation** in order to fulfill the requirements set forth in **Public Act 96-368**.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact **Tereta Love-Rutherford, DRS Policy Advisor** at tereta.love-rutherford@illinois.gov, 217-606-9012.

cc: The Honorable JB Pritzker, Governor
John W. Hollman, Clerk of the House
Tim Anderson, Secretary of the Illinois Senate
Legislative Research Unit
State Government Report Center



STATE OF ILLINOIS

Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities (EEOPD) Task Force Annual Report 2026

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

MAY 1, 2026

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I. EEOPD TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

Public Appointed Members:

Benjamin Evangelista Lumicao, Allstate*
Kathy Carmody, Institute on Public Policy for People with Disabilities
Josh Evans, Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities
Phil Milsk, Attorney and Public Policy Advocate
Patty Walters, Developmental Services Center
Mohammed Khan, Special Olympics Illinois
Britney Godwin, Illinois Assistive Technology Program
Hugo Saltijeral, Valley Sheltered Workshop (14c Certificate)
Katie Blank, Access Living
Marilyn Green, The National Federation of the Blind of Illinois

State Government Representatives:

Ryan Croke, Office of the Governor*
Melissa Cory, Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice
Chris Bond, Illinois Department of Central Management Services
Casey Burke, IDHS-Division of Developmental Disabilities
Anna D’Ascenzo, Illinois Department of Employment Security
Alex Weidenhamer, Illinois Community College Board
Ahlam Jbara, IDHS-Division of Family and Community Services
Lisa Jones, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
Dr. LaMetric Lane, Illinois State Board of Education
Rahnee Patrick, IDHS-Division of Rehabilitation Services
Darius McKinney, IDHS-Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery
Lori Harrison, IDHS-Division of Early Childhood
Anthony Vaughn, Veterans Affairs
Mariel Hamer-Sinclair, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities
Dr. Nkechi Onwuameze, Illinois State Board of Higher Education

*Co-chairs

II. EEOPD BACKGROUND

The Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities (EEOPD) Task Force was established in 2009 via Legislation ([PA 96-368](#)). The EEOPD Task Force's purpose is to

“...analyze programs and policies of the state to determine what changes, modifications, and innovations may be necessary to remove barriers to competitive employment and economic opportunity for persons with disabilities. The Task Force makes recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor including regulatory changes to advance employment and economic opportunities for persons with disabilities in Illinois.”

In 2013 the legislature passed the Employment First Act ([20 ILCS 40](#)), which designated Illinois an [Employment First](#) state. The objective of Employment First is to ensure people with disabilities are afforded the option to engage in integrated, competitive employment at or above minimum wage. Executive order [14-08](#), signed in 2014, set forth a process for Illinois to achieve this goal.

The Task Force originally consisted of four work groups to support the Employment First initiative: Workforce Development, Provider, Employer, and Transition. In 2018, the Task Force published a [Recommendations Report](#), detailing implementation strategies in each of the workgroup focus areas, which continues to guide the work and priorities of the Task Force. The Task Force added the Legislative Workgroup in response to the 2018 recommendations. Lastly, the Dignity in Pay Workgroup was created in 2024 in response to the Dignity in Pay Act, PA 103-1060, which mandates the phase-out of subminimum wage in Illinois by December 31, 2029.

The Task Force involves 16 designated State agencies: the Governor's Office; Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE); Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO); Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE); Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO); Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Divisions of: Rehabilitation Services (DRS), Developmental Disabilities (DDD), Early Childhood (DEC), Family and Community Services (FCS), and Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR); Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities (ICDD); Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES); Central Management Services (CMS); Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ); Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS); and Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition, there are 15 public members appointed by the Governor's Office (at least five of whom are disabled). This stakeholder group is composed of representatives from the following sectors:

- Statewide organizations that advocate for people with physical, developmental, and psychiatric disabilities

- Entities with expertise in assistive technology devices and services for people with disabilities
- Entities that provide employment and training services to people with disabilities
- Advocates for veterans with disabilities
- Centers for independent living & disability services providers
- Organized labor
- Higher education
- Private sector business community
- Entities that provide employment and training services to people with disabilities

III. WORKGROUP BACKGROUND SUMMARIES

A. Workforce Development Workgroup:

The Workforce Development Workgroup was formed to identify key policies, practices, and strategies to align services and to improve opportunities for competitive and integrated employment. The Workforce Development Workgroup's strategic focus areas include:

- 1) The alignment of the State's mandated requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) with Employment First principles. Alignment will result in opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for youth and adults with disabilities to include people currently earning sub-minimum wage and customers in recovery.
- 2) Transformation of the State into a model employer for people with disabilities. The State becoming a model employer will ensure people with significant disabilities can receive reasonable accommodation(s), including exemptions from the current testing and interview process for state employment.
- 3) Modification of the State's Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and the State-Use Program to be consistent with Employment First. Modifications will require statutory and regulatory changes.
- 4) Ensuring the State's website structure and content on www.illinois.gov follows federal and state accessibility laws. Ensuring accessibility will require a centralized and coordinated audit of current content and policies and procedures for posting content moving forward.
- 5) The establishment of a Statewide training protocol on Employment First for new and existing employees. Additionally, using already existing materials and coordinating ongoing training events will facilitate the process.

The Workforce Development Workgroup identified the State agencies and departments that will play a central role in achieving objectives in their strategic focus areas. Notably, Central Management Services (CMS) will play a key role given its responsibility for hiring policies, website management, and training. Additionally, CMS oversees the two major programs that must change to comply with Employment First – the BEP and the State Use Program. Other agencies who will play key roles will be the Illinois Department of Human Services-Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, especially with respect to their work on the implementation of WIOA, and the Department of Innovation & Technology (DoIT) regarding the accessibility of state websites and technology systems.

Chair: Darius McKinney, IDHS-Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery

B. Provider Workgroup:

The Provider Workgroup was formed to identify key policies, practices and strategies that must be addressed and embraced for all Illinois residents to attain employment. The Provider Workgroup's strategic focus areas include:

- 1) Aligning of State policies, practices, and funding mechanisms with the idea that everyone is capable of competitive employment, and employment should be the first consideration for adults of working age.
- 2) Redesigning the State's service delivery system for existing services to support the goal of competitive and integrated employment.
- 3) Addressing Statewide systemic barriers impeding the pursuit of Competitive Integrated Employment and crafting concrete steps for remedying these obstacles.
- 4) Assuring State resources expended on daytime supports are focused on preparing people to pursue and achieve competitive employment and supporting people to become full and productive members of their communities.

The Provider Workgroup identified a multitude of state agencies and departments that will be critical to achieving objectives in their strategic focus areas. The divisions of Rehabilitation Services, Behavioral Health and Recovery, and Developmental Disabilities within the Department of Human Services, are critical entities to pursue and accomplish the steps outlined in our recommendations. The Provider Workgroup also recognizes the pivotal role the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities plays in supporting the evolution toward a more employment-focused system.

Chair: Casey Burke, IDHS – Division of Developmental Disabilities

C. Employer Workgroup:

The Employer Workgroup was created to provide recommendations that will sustain the increased engagement of public and private employers to achieve Employment First in Illinois. Strategic focus areas for the Employer Workgroup include:

- 1) The development of a State-supported awareness campaign to educate employers, both private and public, regarding the benefits, incentives, and value proposition of hiring, training, retaining and advancement of persons with disabilities,
- 2) The creation of a statewide, State-supported shared service portal for employers and vocational providers (including but not limited to community rehabilitation programs),
- 3) The implementation of a statewide, State-supported functional system to connect employers with vocational providers, and
- 4) The development and execution of a statewide, State-supported meaningful and validated measurement process.

The Employer Workgroup identified multiple state agencies and departments that will play a central role in achieving objectives in their strategic focus areas, particularly, the Governor's Office, Central Management Services, Department of Employment Security, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Department of Information Technology, and the Division of Rehabilitation Services along with other divisions within the Department of Human Services.

Chair: Ben Lumicao, Allstate (EEOPD Task Force Co-Chair)

D. Transition Workgroup:

The Transition Workgroup was formed to identify policies and practices that will increase the competitive and integrated employment of youth. The Transition Workgroup's strategic areas of focus include:

- 1) Ensuring the State enacts high-quality transition planning and service coordination personnel at the local and regional levels and using Transition Planning Committees (TPC) effectively. Transition plans and services must be prepared for all students with disabilities in Illinois and must provide consistent, high-quality, individualized services to prepare them for employment and other facets of adult life.

- 2) Improving the State’s collection, analysis, and reporting of post-transition outcome data for students. The task of designing a process for collecting, analyzing, coordinating, and sharing data regarding transitions is assigned to this Task Force.
- 3) Considering the unique needs of the State’s at-risk students with disabilities, (e.g., those coming out of youth corrections systems and diversion programs, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) custody, and students with significant behavioral health needs, and social and emotional learning deficits) and specifically target at-risk youth for appropriate and timely interventions and service coordination.
- 4) Ensuring person-centered planning (PCP) starts early in the transition process and continues as required under the HCBS waiver rules into adult services and employment statewide. Students with significant disabilities who will likely qualify for Home & Community-Based Services (HCBS) Medicaid waiver services should have PCP incorporated into the transition planning process.
- 5) Providing meaningful access statewide to post-secondary education for students with disabilities. Meaningful access requires, among other things, effective communication with high schools, parents, and students to ensure full understanding of the eligibility and verification requirements for accommodations and modifications under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA, and information about services available at post-secondary institutions.

The Transition Workgroup identified multiple state agencies and departments that will play a central role in achieving objectives in their strategic focus areas. Primarily, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) must be leaders in this endeavor and include the State agencies and departments whose participation is needed. The workgroup also identified some key non-State participants such as local school districts, special education joint agreements, Transition Planning Committees (TPC), the Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP) (due to the well-established and growing importance of AT in preparing students with disabilities for adult life, including post-secondary education, vocational training and employment), centers for independent living, adult service providers, and others.

Co-Chairs: Dr. LaMetric Lane, Illinois State Board of Education
Mariel Hamer-Sinclair, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities

E. Legislative Workgroup:

The Legislative Workgroup was formed after publishing the 2017 EEOPD recommendations report. The role of the workgroup is to consider legislation and policy, advise the Task Force on legislative and policy ideas, and review relevant pending

legislation. The Legislative Workgroup will continue to solidify its strategic focus areas in 2026, by engaging in the following tasks:

- 1) Monitoring legislation relevant to the work of the Task Force, and
- 2) Informing Task Force members of updates to proposed/pending legislation related to Competitive Integrated Employment.

The Legislative Workgroup will also identify the state agencies and departments who will play a central role in achieving objectives in their strategic focus areas. Partners will include at least employment service providers, people with disabilities, disability trade associations, and disability advocacy organizations.

Chair: Phil Milsik, Attorney and Public Policy Advocate

F. Dignity in Pay Workgroup:

The Dignity in Pay Workgroup was formed to create a multi-year plan of recommended actions, outcomes, and benchmarks to help the State successfully eliminate the use of 14(c) certificates by December 31, 2029. The Dignity in Pay Workgroup's focus areas include:

- 1) Identification, gathering, and analytics of State data to guide the work.
- 2) Considering people in Illinois earning subminimum wage who want to transition to competitive employment, people who do not wish to transition to competitive employment, existing State employment programs, capacity limits of providers, personal choice, use of emerging technologies, and access to reliable transportation.
- 3) Proposing changes to State law and regulations.
- 4) Dissemination of relevant information and education and training needs statewide.

Chair: Kimberly Mercer-Schleider (Acting)

IV. KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND UPDATES

The EEOPD Task Force met quarterly between May 2025 and April 2026. The meetings were held at locations in Springfield, Ill. and Chicago, Ill., with a remote option also available. The Task Force worked diligently to review the [2025 Multi-Year Plan](#) and continue efforts towards

accomplishing the tasks outlined in Workgroup Activities Reports submitted throughout the reporting period.

The Task Force worked closely with state agencies and stakeholders on the implementation of the Dignity in Pay Act. This law mandates phasing out subminimum wages for workers with disabilities by December 31, 2029. Efforts are well underway to ensure the State meets the mandates set forth in this legislation.

From October 2024 to September 2025, Illinois received technical assistance and resources from National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (NEON) subject matter experts. The technical assistance provided support to Illinois in four major priority areas:

- 1) Phasing out 14(c) subminimum wage in compliance with the Dignity in Pay Act.
- 2) Creation of a governmental interagency data infrastructure.
- 3) Assistance with further development of statewide Employment First strategic planning and workforce development.
- 4) Mental health and reentry services for persons with disabilities involved in the justice system.

In August 2025, the Task Force welcomed the NEON Core State subject matter experts for a presentation on national best practices and recommendations to improve disability employment outcomes. Recommendations focused on data collection and performance metrics, information exchange, capacity building, service model expansion, funding alignment, benefits navigation, and business engagement. Task Force members discussed how to prioritize recommendations, explore models from other states, and align with Illinois' DIP implementation.

Technical assistance through the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) and NEON Project also concluded in August 2025. NEON subject matter experts provided support to 14(c) providers in Illinois by:

- 1) Aiding individual 14(c) providers in their transformation efforts.
- 2) Creating a learning community with other providers nationwide on 14(c) transformation.
- 3) Working with providers to create a short-term implementation and action plan to lay the foundation for achieving successful 14(c) transformation.

The Task Force is encouraged by the milestones reached in the Customized Employment Demonstration Program. The purpose of the Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act is to ensure measures are in place that will aid individuals with intellectual and

developmental disabilities or a similar condition in achieving and maintaining Competitive Integrated Employment through the process of customized planning and negotiation.

The Task Force commends the substantial progress being made to address transportation disparities throughout the state. In November 2025, IDHS-Division of Rehabilitation Services (IDHS-DRS) and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) held a statewide workshop to examine transportation barriers and opportunities across Illinois and to establish measurable outcomes that can guide improvements in access and mobility equity. During fiscal year 2026, IDHS-DRS also invested \$94,000 in the Statewide Independent Living Council of Illinois to support work to address transportation barriers, strengthen regional mobility coordination, and expand community-driven solutions that improve access to employment for individuals with disabilities.

The Task Force applauds the collaboration between IDHS-DRS and the Social Security Administration (SSA). This collaboration has resulted in the approval of multiple Employment Networks (ENs) to provide benefits counseling, and long-term employment supports, expanding access to much-needed services. The fear of losing Social Security benefits has long been a significant hurdle for many people with disabilities. By expanding access to benefits counseling, IDHS-DRS and SSA demonstrated their commitment to supporting individuals in making informed choices regarding pursuing Competitive Integrated Employment.

The Task Force acknowledges the significance of the progress that has been made through the Subminimum Wage to Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Initiative. The project promotes innovative strategies to expand Competitive Integrated Employment opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities who are pursuing or currently working in subminimum wage positions.

The EEOPD Task Force welcomed new members to the Transportation Subgroup within the Employers Workgroup in March 2026. This subgroup will continue to identify barriers and solicit engagement from transportation providers throughout the State.

The EEOPD Task Force would like to recognize Ganapathi Ramaswamy, Deputy General Counsel, who served in a non-voting advisory position for the Illinois Department of Labor. The Task Force thanks him for his service; his efforts and contributions are greatly appreciated.

Lastly, administrators within IDHS-DRS, along with the Employment First Administrator, Employment First Coordinator, and EEOPD Task Force Chairpersons continued work to meet the following priorities:

- 1) Filling membership vacancies within the EEOPD Task Force. The focus has been to bring aboard subject matter experts and those with lived experiences.

- 2) Meeting with representatives from the Governor’s Office to ensure the EEOPD Task Force has appropriate resources to move recommendations forward and support its workgroups.

V. WORKGROUP REPORTING ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Workforce Development:

During the reporting period, a major focus of the Workforce Development Workgroup’s meetings was recruiting new members who are recognized as subject matter experts. The workgroup specifically sought individuals with strong experience supporting people who have been involved in the justice system and who also have mental health diagnoses. Their expertise is important because these individuals often face significant challenges when trying to obtain Competitive Integrated Employment, and knowledgeable professionals can help address those barriers more effectively.

The workgroup also continued its efforts to make sure that accessibility and disability inclusion remained central to the broader initiatives led by the Chief Equity Officer in the Governor’s Office. Strengthening this partnership was a key priority, as the workgroup aimed to ensure that disability and accessibility concerns were fully integrated into the Governor’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) priorities. Through consistent communication and collaboration, the workgroup reinforced the message that accessibility must be a core part of any statewide initiative focused on equity.

In addition to these efforts, the workgroup continued making progress on several ongoing objectives. These included:

- Increasing both the number and percentage of State employees with disabilities, recognizing that a more inclusive workforce benefits the entire state.
- Supporting statewide efforts to expand opportunities for expunging criminal records, since criminal history often presents a major obstacle to employment.
- Collaborating with various disability-focused organizations and inviting them to serve as guest presenters at Task Force meetings, helping to bring in new perspectives and strengthen statewide partnerships.

The Workforce Development Workgroup offers the following recommendations, which build on the progress made in the previous year:

- 1) Transforming Illinois into a model employer for people with disabilities who have justice involvement. Many individuals who have criminal justice involvement do not get employment opportunities they and are highly qualified for because of their justice involvement. The State becoming a model employer will ensure people with disabilities who have justice involvement are able to gain and maintain employment in fields that they are qualified for and likely to be successful in.

- 2) Amending State law and regulations to allow people with behavioral health issues who have justice involvement to gain and maintain employment opportunities in the health care field. Many individuals who have held positions as clinical staff in the mental health field have been terminated because of their justice involvement – even after the individual has shown to be an excellent employee and great at their job tasks.
- 3) Assisting people with disabilities who have justice involvement with getting into training programs or classes that will teach them how to become self-employed and create their own business.
- 4) Establishing a statewide training protocol on Employment First for new and existing employees, using existing materials and coordinating ongoing training events.

B. Provider Workgroup:

The Provider Workgroup is tasked with identification of key policies, practices and strategies that must be addressed and embraced for all Illinoisans to attain the goal of Competitive Integrated Employment.

From May 2025 to May 2026, the Provider Workgroup met nine times, and had participation from members of 15 provider agencies, the Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (IARF), the Institute for Public Policy for People with Disabilities, the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities (ICDD) and IDHS Divisions of Family and Community Services (FCS), Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and Developmental Disabilities (DDD).

Throughout the year, the workgroup’s efforts included discussion and examination and development of recommendations and feedback related to:

- Engagement in DRS and DDD employment supports
- Utilization of DRS Vocational Rehabilitation contracts
- Strategies to support transition away from subminimum wage
- Community Day Services
- Implementation and impact of Dignity in Pay

The Provider Workgroup’s focus narrowed in November 2025 to address a specific recommendation within the Dignity in Pay Multi-Year Plan (DIP MYP), which called for establishing a subgroup dedicated to ensuring recommendations for Community Day Services (CDS) and Meaningful Day options are added to the DIP MYP for those who do

not choose to pursue Competitive Integrated Employment, and retirement options for individuals aging in the system.

Given the composition of the EEOPD Provider Workgroup at the time the DIP MYP was set into motion, the Provider Workgroup was tasked with the work of the CDS/Meaningful Day Subgroup, whose members were already representative of the required partners and who possessed the requisite expertise to deliver quality feedback.

Indicators of success for this project included:

- Establishing a representative group by December 2025 (completed November 2025)
- Ongoing systems improvement recommendations created and included in the MYP (ongoing)

The Workgroup's efforts included review of individuals' needs, particularly those engaged in subminimum wage activity, who may not immediately desire a transition to Competitive Integrated Employment. Factors influencing an individual's decision to not seek Competitive Integrated Employment include proximity to retirement, making an informed choice to pursue non-work activity, and individuals for whom employment may be an emerging interest but not immediately actionable.

Although not fully complete, the Provider Workgroup reached consensus on the following recommendations:

1. Review, design, evaluation and implementation of a CDS and Meaningful Day funding and reimbursement model designed to address acuity-based needs and the changes in utilization of certain programs and services over the lifespan.

Rationale: A segment of individuals currently participating in subminimum wage activities require additional medical, behavioral, or specialized support to transition from facility-based settings to community opportunities.

2. Evaluate alternative models to address gaps in the transportation network.

Rationale: Many organizations that have historically operated a primarily facility-based subminimum wage model have often structured their transportation resources around limited, predictable trips and product transit. As programs transition toward more community-centered models, existing vehicle capacity and infrastructure may not be sufficient to support the increased frequency, flexibility, and geographic reach required for meaningful community participation. While efforts are underway to modify and improve public transportation options, a comprehensive approach must also account for the full cost of community access.

3. To increase expertise and improve retention, adopt a more comprehensive training and advancement regimen for key provider agency personnel associated with individuals served, including but not limited to Direct Support Professionals, Job Coaches, Job Developers, Case Managers and Supervisors.

Rationale: Many provider agency staff who currently support and supervise subminimum wage activities have had limited training and practical exposure to fully integrated, community-based service models. As a result, transitioning from workshop-based settings to community-centered supports requires additional skill development, coaching, and structured professional development. Additionally, the current On-the-Job Training (OJT) content and requirements do not consistently emphasize individualized community inclusion practices or reflect the competencies staff are expected to demonstrate six months' post-completion. Aligning training curricula with long-term role expectations (including community facilitation, employment supports, and person-centered implementation) would better position personnel to support successful transitions to integrated services.

4. Explore modifications to the Discovery and Personal Planning Process to address disconnects, or lack of clarity, between Personal Plan guidance and the day-to-day expression of goals and desires from people served to their provider agency.

Rationale: While person-centered Discovery and Planning remain foundational and necessary, there are natural shifts in priorities over time. What an individual identifies as important at one point of the year may evolve in a short time frame as circumstances, experiences, and goals change. Strengthening ongoing communication and structured plan reviews can help ensure collaboration that planning remains responsive while also aligning with implementation realities. At the same time, the principles of conflict-free case management should be upheld in a way that takes into consideration the operational scope, capacity, and expertise within the provider community, fostering collaboration rather than separation between planning and service delivery.

5. Provide access to a cost-effective and publicly accessible resource library which will serve as a hub and reference point for agency personnel to support individuals served in developing, planning, and executing Meaningful Day activities.

Rationale: Many existing resource assets including curriculum materials, activity planning tools, and educational content require regular updating and review, yet are often restricted behind paywalls, limited to coalition membership, or otherwise difficult for providers to access. Agencies that have historically operated

subminimum wage programs need reliable, cost-effective access to high-quality materials that clearly define and reinforce the principles of a Meaningful Day. This is particularly important for individuals whose primary goals may not be focused on Competitive Integrated Employment. In these cases, providers would benefit from practical guidance and structured resources addressing areas such as volunteerism, health and wellness, recreation, relationship development, spirituality, financial literacy, lifelong learning, and general skill maintenance and growth. However, access to, and ongoing updates of, these materials are not typically supported within the current funding framework. Consideration of sustainable mechanisms to ensure equitable access to quality resources would strengthen implementation and consistency across providers. An accessible library of this nature would lend itself well to agency personnel retention, advancement and expertise and their impact on individuals served.

These recommendations represent the collective expertise and shared perspectives of the Provider Workgroup and demonstrate the group's continued commitment to advancing high-quality, person-centered services across the state.

C. Employer Workgroup:

During the reporting period, the Employer Workgroup concentrated on strengthening its membership, clarifying its strategic objectives, and enhancing coordination with related workgroups. Recruitment efforts prioritized engaging additional private employers and service providers, particularly those transitioning away from the use of 14(c) Subminimum Wage certificates, as their participation is essential to supporting fair and equitable employment practices.

The workgroup also continued its efforts to identify new participants for the Transportation Subgroup, recognizing transportation as a persistent barrier to meaningful employment for many individuals with disabilities. To maintain alignment across initiatives, the workgroup sustained regular communication with the broader task force, ensuring consistent information sharing and collaboration.

Looking ahead, the Employer Workgroup intends to introduce the EEOPD Task Force and the Dignity in Pay (DIP) initiative at several disability-focused summits scheduled for later in the year. In preparation, the workgroup has engaged with employers throughout Chicagoland to increase awareness of the initiative and to broaden organizational support for its goals.

The workgroup values its ongoing collaboration with partner groups and recognizes the importance of cross-work group engagement in accomplishing shared

objectives. This collaboration is particularly significant with the Dignity in Pay (DIP) Workgroup, whose mission closely aligns with the Employer Workgroup's priorities. Through these efforts, the Employer Workgroup continues to advance its commitment to promoting inclusive, equitable employment opportunities across the state.

The Employer Workgroup offers no recommendations at this time.

D. Transition Workgroup:

During the reporting period, the EEOPD Transition Workgroup identified an ongoing need for a more coordinated and innovative approach to supporting individuals with disabilities as they move from secondary education into adulthood. Recognizing the complexity of this transition, the Workgroup directed its efforts toward strengthening recommendations for the Dignity in Pay (DIP) Multi-Year Plan (MYP) Report, improving collaboration across partners, and maintaining continuity despite periods of reduced member availability.

In August 2025, the Transition Workgroup conducted a detailed review of the DIP MYP with particular attention to transition-related data and outcomes. This analysis helped the group evaluate existing strategies and highlight areas where additional guidance or refinement was needed. Parallel to this work, the group moved forward with establishing a dedicated subgroup responsible for developing educational materials focused on vocational rehabilitation, education, and training. This effort is being carried out in partnership with the IDHS-DRS to ensure the materials reflect accurate, comprehensive, and accessible information for students, families, and educators.

Additionally, the workgroup prepared to address anticipated changes in federal special education regulations. By monitoring these developments, the group aims to ensure that future recommendations align with updated legal requirements and support best practices for transition planning. Throughout the reporting period, the workgroup remained committed to enhancing coordination, supporting informed decision making, and promoting a more seamless transition experience for youth with disabilities.

The Transition Workgroup recommends formal approval to lead the development of a statewide navigational tool to assist schools, vocational training programs, families, and people with disabilities in understanding and accessing the expanded DRS Training & College Initiative. This tool should be designed in plain language and be family-friendly, ensuring it is accessible, easy to use, and responsive to the diverse needs of students, families, and professionals. Its purpose is to create clear,

consistent, and equitable pathways to education, training, and employment supports—ultimately improving transition outcomes for people with disabilities across Illinois.

Proposed steps for implementation:

- Form a project team with Transition Workgroup and DRS staff.
- Host input sessions (students, families, ISC agencies, colleges, training providers).
- Draft the tool content.
- Develop accessible formats, including short videos.
- Pilot test and refine.
- Statewide launch and dissemination.
- Annual updates and review.

E. Legislative Workgroup:

The Legislative Workgroup concentrated on re-establishing regular meetings, addressing membership changes, and evaluating legislative priorities. Discussions centered on the possibility of new legislation related to Community Day Services, outreach legislation to strengthen awareness of the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program among school transition coordinators and families, and concerns regarding federal pressures on home and community-based services.

The Legislative Workgroup also supports the passage of HB4581, which calls for a partnership between the WIPA program and Illinois State Board of Education ISBE for the purpose of providing information about the program to transition coordinators at high schools, parents, and guardians.

The Legislative Workgroup remains committed to:

1. Accepting legislative referrals on behalf of the EEOPD Task Force.
2. Working with the Governor’s Office and legislators to remove barriers and support employment for people with disabilities.

The Legislative Workgroup offers no recommendations currently.

E. Dignity in Pay Workgroup:

The Dignity in Pay (DIP) Act was enacted in January 2025 and required the development of a Multi-Year Plan (MYP) to be presented to the EEOPD Task Force and submitted to both the Governor’s Office and the General Assembly by July 1,

2025. Implementation of the DIP MYP began shortly thereafter. During the initial months, efforts focused on reengaging stakeholders and reestablishing the organizational structures necessary to carry out the work. This included transitioning the EEOPD DIP Workgroup from developing recommendations to actively implementing them.

The EEOPD DIP Workgroup plays a central role in guiding and supporting Illinois' transition away from the use of 14(c) subminimum wage toward Competitive Integrated Employment and meaningful community participation for individuals with developmental disabilities. The overarching goal is to ensure that individuals, families, providers, and communities receive the support needed throughout this multiyear transformation. Workgroup members contribute to this effort by:

- Sharing their perspectives and lived experiences. Reviewing and refining strategies and recommendations included in the DIP MYP.
- Identifying challenges and proposing practical, actionable solutions.
- Serving as advocates for equity, opportunity, and inclusion within their regions and networks.

Since its reorganization, the Workgroup has convened four times. Key areas of focus included the need for improved communication among entities responsible for service recommendations for individuals with developmental disabilities, as well as strategies for strengthening community readiness to expand employment opportunities.

The Dignity in Pay Workgroup remains committed to advancing the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Dignity in Pay 2025 Multi-Year Plan and looks forward to continued progress in the year ahead.

VI. CONCLUSION:

Over the next year, the EEOPD Task Force will continue to approach its responsibilities with seriousness, consistency, and a strong commitment to meaningful progress. The Task Force recognizes that it plays a vital role in shaping a more inclusive and equitable future for people with disabilities throughout the State of Illinois. As the modern workforce evolves due to changes in technology, economic conditions, and employer expectations, the Task Force remains dedicated to advancing opportunities for Competitive Integrated Employment. This commitment aligns with the vision of the Illinois Employment First Act, which affirms that competitive, integrated employment should be the first and preferred outcome for working age individuals with disabilities.

Although progress has been made in recent years, the Task Force acknowledges that many individuals with disabilities still face significant challenges when seeking employment or trying to maintain long-term success in the workplace. These challenges may include limited access to support services, unreliable transportation, or outdated misconceptions about disabilities that may persist within work environments. Additionally, broader systemic issues—such as inconsistent resources across regions or inequities in education and training—can also restrict access to opportunity. Because these barriers remain substantial and complex, the Task Force is committed to developing strategies that address both immediate needs and long-term structural improvements. Its work is grounded in principles of social equity, economic justice, and the protection of civil rights for individuals with disabilities.

It is central to the Task Force’s mission to review and recommend changes to longstanding systems that influence employment outcomes. State programs, employer practices, and community support systems each play a role in shaping whether an individual with a disability can obtain and maintain meaningful employment. By examining these systems closely, the Task Force aims to expand opportunities for personal growth, economic self-sufficiency, and independence. The ultimate goal is to foster a workforce environment in which individuals with disabilities can participate fully, contribute their skills, and achieve financial stability.

The Task Force has also identified several priorities that will continue to guide its work. One significant focus is identifying publicly available resources that support individuals in both obtaining and retaining competitive, integrated employment. These resources might include job-training programs, vocational counseling, assistive technology, benefits guidance, transportation support, and workplace accommodations. By gathering and sharing clear information about these resources, the Task Force aims to help individuals with disabilities, along with their families and support networks, better navigate the employment process.

Another key priority involves developing recommendations to help the state reduce the risk of job loss among individuals with significant disabilities or higher support needs. Many workers who rely on specialized or intensive support are more vulnerable to employment disruptions when those supports break down or become unavailable. To address this issue, the Task Force plans to encourage the state to adopt consistent, well-organized strategies that ensure continuity of services, maintain stability in the workplace, and protect against preventable interruptions in employment. Strengthening these safeguards will create a more reliable employment system for those who are most at risk.

The Task Force also aims to expand the role of Community Day Services (CDS) programs by encouraging them to more actively support employment and entrepreneurial pathways. Traditionally, CDS programs have focused on life-skills training and community engagement. However, the Task Force believes these programs can be enhanced to better prepare individuals for integrated work environments. By strengthening skill development, introducing

opportunities for entrepreneurship, and incorporating workforce readiness components, CDS programs can offer individuals a wider range of options for pursuing meaningful employment.

Recognizing the importance of private sector engagement, the Task Force will continue strengthening its partnerships with employers throughout the state. This includes promoting inclusive hiring practices, supporting diversity efforts, and helping employers understand the advantages of employing individuals with disabilities. Through education, outreach, and collaboration, the Task Force hopes to reduce misconceptions and build greater confidence among employers, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

In addition, the Task Force acknowledges that many students with disabilities face significant challenges when transitioning from school to independent adult life. Barriers such as limited career exploration, inconsistent transition planning, and gaps in coordination between schools and community programs can limit postsecondary opportunities. To address these challenges, the Task Force will support efforts that improve transition services, promote earlier career development, and create pathways that lead directly to Competitive Integrated Employment.

The Task Force will also continue its involvement with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Unified State Plan by collaborating with key partners, including DRS, DCEO, IDES, and ICCB. Working together with these agencies helps ensure that statewide workforce strategies remain aligned with the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Finally, the Task Force will support the expansion of self-employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. By encouraging agencies to promote entrepreneurship through training, mentorship, and financial guidance, the Task Force aims to provide individuals with more options to pursue meaningful, self-directed careers.

The EEOPD Task Force remains strongly committed to improving employment outcomes, removing systemic barriers, and promoting independence and economic stability for individuals with disabilities across Illinois. Through collaborative efforts and persistent advocacy, the Task Force will continue working to create a more inclusive and equitable workforce for all.