



Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

Employer Education & Engagement Committee

Minutes
September 10th, 2025
1:00pm – 2:00pm (EST)

Attendees:

Merry Reid Sheffer, Katie Wolf Whaley, Laurie Mays, Terry Madden, Zachary Sappenfield, and Amanda Hutchinson.

Staff Attendees:

Nanci Howard, Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Anu Kumari, Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrative Specialist Senior, KYOVR Assistant Director II, Kristen Beach, and KYOVR Staff Assistant, Betty Whittaker.

Members Absent:

Dawn Gardner, Jessica Beaven, Todd Coffey, Rebecca Wilson, , Kitty Jones, and Aaron Poynter.

Guests Present:

Bev Harp, Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW).

Welcome:

Employment First Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were held. All participants reviewed the agenda.

ISAW Update and Discussion

Employment First Committee, Merry Reid Sheffer emphasized the importance of continuing the progress and momentum created by the Kentucky RETAIN Program and sustaining employer engagement efforts. With the conclusion of Kentucky RETAIN in May 2025, the committee has identified a new opportunity to collaborate with Bev Harp and the Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW) program.

ISAW/Employment First Monthly Video Collaboration Series

To extend the reach of autism-informed employer training, ISAW and Employment First will begin producing a series of short, topic-specific videos. These will serve as practical resources for employers in areas such as:

- The benefits of hiring autistic workers
- Interviewing and onboarding strategies
- Workplace accommodations (e.g., sensory and social communication supports)

The Committee also discussed recruiting employer questions to guide video content and invite employers to participate in the series in an effort to guide other employers on the benefits of hiring individuals with Autism

The Committee will host quarterly, interactive gatherings, via Zoom, to allow employers to discuss the video content, ask questions, and share best practices. These sessions will be hosted on the UKHDI platform.

Timeline

- Early October 2025 – Release of the first short video
- Early November & December 2025 – Additional monthly videos released
- January 2026 – First interactive employer session (meeting format, not webinar)

Monthly Video Series Outreach Efforts

- ISAW's newsletter distribution will support ongoing outreach for the series.
- The Kentucky RETAIN webinar listserv, coordinated by KYOVR Staff Assistant Betty, will serve as the initial audience base.
- Partners such as the Kentucky Chamber and the Coalition for Workforce Diversity will help amplify promotion and extend employer engagement.
- All videos will be archived online for ongoing access by employers.
- Bev Harp and the ISAW team will lead content development and facilitate discussions.

Evaluation

Following each session, surveys will be distributed to capture employer feedback, guide future video topics, and measure impact. The UKHDI Qualtrics platform will be utilized to streamline collection and reporting.

Policy of state guardianship

The committee highlighted several policy-related challenges that must be addressed to strengthen employment opportunities:

- Guardianship requirements create significant barriers for individuals with disabilities seeking employment.
- Challenges include:
 - Obtaining required occupational licensure..
 - Signing new-hire paperwork, where guardians must provide authorization.
 - Receiving wages or accessing pay when bank cards cannot be issued in the individual's name.

These issues highlight the need for clearer and more consistent policies across regions. Guardianship language has recently been incorporated into a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Medicaid, and other partners, which may provide a framework for addressing these concerns.

2025 Annual report recommendations

- Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, and KYOVR Administrator Nanci Howard will incorporate identified policy barriers and solutions into the draft Annual Report.
- Committee will review the draft to ensure priority issues, including guardianship and accommodations, are accurately represented.

Additional discussion

- Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, reminded and shared with committee members a [link](#) to the "*Modifications to the Regulations Implementing Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended; Extension of Comment Period*". The public comment period will conclude on September 17, 2025, which impacts federal contractors' hiring practices for people with disabilities.
- Committee Chair Merry Reid Sheffer announced that a tentative "save the date" has been set for the Kentucky Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) Conference is planned for December 8–9 in Elizabethtown, offering an in-person opportunity for providers to gather and share resources.

Public Comment:

No public comment addressed.

Adjournment:

Chair Merry Reid Sheffer thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting

Date: October 8, 2025

Time: 1:00pm to 2:00pm (EST)

Administrator: Nanci Howard

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