



**Kentucky Employment First Council**

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**Andy Beshear**

Governor

**Jamie Link**

Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

# Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting Minutes

January 12th, 2024

1:00pm – 03:00pm

Zoom

Meeting ID: 822 8422 1610

## Members Present

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Vice-Chair, Morgan Turner, Legislative Liaison, Diana Merzweiler, David Allgood, Bill Bates, Johnny Callebs, Todd Coffey, Tal Curry, Jeff Edwards, Amanda Friend, Jason Wheatley on behalf of Gretta Hylton, Annette Jett, Andrew Johnson, Cora McNabb, Jeff White, Rebecca Wilson, Lori Norton and Merry Reid Sheffer.

## Members Absent

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Jessica Beaven, Staci Cain, Amanda Owen, Amy Luttrell, Dawn Gardner, Frank Huffman, Leslie Hoffman, Larry Taylor, Tom Hamilton and Zach Morgan.

## Staff Present

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Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) Administrator, Nanci Howard, KYOVR Administrative Specialist, Pepper Caudill, KYOVR Assistant Director, Kristen Beach, KYOVR Manager, Deana Wilson-Kimble, KYOVR Manager, Michelle Cobb, KYOVR Manager, Ron O’Hair, KYOVR Staff Assistant, Betty Whittaker, KYOVR Manager, KYOVR Division Director, Holly Hendricks, KYOVR Assistant Director, Jonathan White, KYOVR Manager, Veronica Dale.

## Guest(s) Present

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Karen Lee, Melanie Tyner-Wilson, Kimberly Wickert, Makenzie McCormick, Susie Edwards, Melissa Marvel, Lisa Amstutz, Tara Eversole, Audra Shutt, Cathy Anderson, Dondra Meredith, Heather Wood and Johnny Collett.

## Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review:

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(Due to inclement weather, all state buildings were closed, and the meeting was held virtually from the Zoom platform.) Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called the meeting to order and Administrator, Nanci Howard welcomed all attendees to the meeting. A roll call was taken, and a quorum was established.

## Staff Report

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Administrator, Nanci Howard provided a brief staff report for the council. She stated that the Annual Report had been submitted prior to December 1st, 2023, and explained that this report was still pending review at the Governor's Office. Nanci encouraged member participation in the upcoming committee meetings. Lastly, she gave a recap of the 2024 National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (Project NEON) award and reminded everyone that its focus is to be on Provider Capacity for this period. Nanci reintroduced Karen Lee to the group and turned the meeting over to Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley

## Minutes Approval

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to be brought forth to approve the October 13th, 2023, Quarterly Meeting Minutes. Member, David Allgood made the motion to approve the December 13th, 2023, Quarterly Meeting Minutes and a second was provided by Vice Chair, Morgan Turner. A vote was taken, and Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Vice-Chair, Morgan Turner, Legislative Liaison, Diana Merzweiler, David Allgood, Bill Bates, Johnny Callebs, Todd Coffey, Tal Curry, Jeff Edwards, Amanda Friend, Jason Wheatley on behalf of Gretta Hylton, Annette Jett, Andrew Johnson and Rebecca Wilson were in favor. There was no opposition, and the motion passed

## Chair Report

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley began by explaining the importance of collaboration amongst council members and people outside of the council to spread information regarding Employment First. She gave examples of these types of collaborations which included Member, Amanda Owen's non-profit and the Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities. Katie went on to give additional examples of collaborations, presentations, or shared information regarding Employment First and the positive impact it is creating. There was brief discussion amongst the group regarding this information. There was further discussion concerning where the shared resources could be accessed, and it was stated that the information could be accessed through the Employment First page on the KYOVR website. It was also stated that any additional information needing to be added to the website should be sent to Administrator, Nanci Howard or Administrative Specialist, Pepper Caudill, so that it may be uploaded to the website. It was realized that the KYOVR website had not been updated to include the 2024 Council and Committee meeting dates and Nanci ensured that those would be updated soon.

## National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (Project NEON) Presentation

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Subject Matter Expert, Karen Lee presented the 2024 Project NEON utilizing a Power Point Presentation that was presented to all members in attendance of the meeting. The presentation explained the NEON project, past accomplishments and what the state of Kentucky can expect to gain through the 2024 award. There was a brief discussion held amongst the council regarding this matter.

## Committee Presentation(s)/Discussion(s)

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### *Advocacy and Education Committee Report*

Chair, Amanda Owen was not present at the meeting, therefore no update or presentation was given. Chair, Karie Wolf Whaley reminded the council that all the committee's prior meeting minutes were included in the First Quarter Meeting Materials so the council could review the committee's work utilizing that resource.

### *Employer Education and Engagement Committee Report*

Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer explained that the committee had been working with Kimberly Wickert from RETAIN Kentucky on partnering together to launch the Lunch & Learn Series. She provided a brief summary of that work and gave examples of three topics that the partnership will develop together. (i.e. 1. Employment First and CIE definition. 2. Intro to Etiquette, Myths, and Range of Disability Experience. 3. Demystifying Regulatory Issues around Disability- “How Accessibility Measures in the Hiring Process can Increase your Candidate Pool and Fill Jobs.”).

### *Provider Capacity Committee Report*

Chair, Jeff White explained that the committee has been working on determining what areas of the state have supported employment services issues and discussing how the council could address those issues.

### *Transition Committee Report*

Chair, Jessica Beaven and Co-Chair, Frank Huffman were not present at the meeting, therefore no update or presentation was given. Chair, Karie Wolf Whaley reminded the council that all the committee’s prior meeting minutes were included in the First Quarter Meeting Materials so the council could review the committee’s work utilizing that resource.

### *Public Policy Committee Report*

Chair, Diana Merzweiler explained that the committee has been working on identifying and aligning state policies with federal policies to ensure integrated employment.

## Public Comment

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None.

## Action Items

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Member, David Allgood made the motion to approve the December 13th, 2023, Quarterly Meeting Minutes and a second was provided by Vice Chair, Morgan Turner. A vote was taken, and Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Vice-Chair, Morgan Turner, Legislative Liaison, Diana Merzweiler, David Allgood, Bill Bates, Johnny Calles, Todd Coffey, Tal Curry, Jeff Edwards, Amanda Friend, Jason Wheatley on behalf of Gretta Hylton,

Annette Jett, Andrew Johnson and Rebecca Wilson were in favor. There was no opposition and the motion passed.

## Adjournment

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member, David Allgood made the motion to adjourn. Member, Cora McNabb provided a second to the motion A vote was taken, and Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Vice-Chair, Morgan Turner, Legislative Liaison, Diana Merzweiler, David Allgood, Bill Bates, Johnny Callebs, Todd Coffey, Tal Curry, Jeff Edwards, Amanda Friend, Jason Wheatley on behalf of Gretta Hylton, Annette Jett, Andrew Johnson and Rebecca Wilson were in favor. There was no opposition and the motion passed.

## Next Meeting Date

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Friday, April 12th, 2024

1:00pm – 3:00pm

Hybrid Format

Location: TBD



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**Andy Beshear**

Governor

**Jamie Link**

Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

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# Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting Minutes

April 12th, 2024

1:00pm – 03:00pm

Zoom

Meeting ID: 893 6775 0478

## Members Present

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Legislative Liaison, Diana Merzweiler, David Allgood, Bill Bates, Johnny Calles, Todd Coffey, Tal Curry, Amanda Friend, Thomas Hamilton, Frank Huffman, Jason Wheatley as proxy for Gretta Hylton, Annette Jett, Amy Luttrell, Cora McNabb, Lori Norton, Amanda Owen, Merry Reid Sheffer, Larry Taylor, Jeff White, Andrew Johnson and Rebecca Wilson.

## Members Absent

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Vice-Chair, Morgan Turner, Jessica Beaven, Staci Cain, Jeff Edwards, Dawn Gardner, and Leslie Hoffman.

## Staff Present

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Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) Administrator, Nanci Howard, KYOVR Administrative Specialist, Pepper Caudill, KYOVR Florence Branch Manager, Michelle Cobb, KYOVR Employer Services Branch Manager, Deana Wilson-Kimble, KYOVR CRP/SE Branch Manager, Ron O’Hair, KYOVR Staff Assistant, Betty Whittaker, KYOVR Division Director, Holly Hendricks, KYOVR Deputy Executive Director, Susie Edwards and KYOVR Assistant Director, Jonathan White.

## Guest(s) Present

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Kimberly Wickert, Heather Wood, Johnny Collett, Shelly Durbin, Tracy Belfield, Audra Shutt, Carrie Wedding and Cathy Anderson.

## Interpreters

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Alisha Salyer and Tara Eversole

## Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review:

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley welcomed all attendees to the meeting and a roll call was taken to establish quorum. Pepper Caudill provided the roll call and determined there was a quorum.

## Staff Report

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Administrator, Nanci Howard, began her report by announcing that the meeting materials would no longer be distributed through the mail but rather via email. She concluded her report by providing virtual housekeeping rules and upcoming committee dates for Council members.

## Approval of Minutes

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley directed members to the meeting minutes from the January 12th, 2024 meeting. She called for a motion to accept the minutes as written. David Allgood made the motion to accept the January 12th, 2024 Council minutes. Second, Thomas Hamilton. No opposition. Motion carried.

## Chair Report

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley presented the Chair report. She announced that she is excited to see how Employment First is spreading and stated the House Bill 144 Commission's Employment Committee collaborated with UKHDI and the previous Employment First Council to produce a video. In the video, she explained, past and current council members are included speaking on the importance of Employment First. She encouraged attendees to share the video with their networks. Katie stated the video was shared with the Council but will resend. She concluded her report by informing

attendees the Council's Executive Committee has discussed various ways to get the message out about Employment First and how to track this. She thanked the committees for their diligent work throughout the year.

## National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (Project NEON) Update

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, provided an update on Project NEON and the efforts made through the technical assistance award grant. She began by stating, the lead Subject Matter Expert (SME), Karen Lee, has been working with the committees and providing continuous support and guidance to each Chair and Council leadership. Katie said Karen has been working with the committees on how the committees can support the legislative charge as it relates to the Council Strategic Plan. She explained there is a spreadsheet that Karen created that is a crosswalk to both the charge and the plan. She announced there will be one on one meetings with Karen Lee and each chair to discuss how those goals and the charge coincide with the plan. Katie continued to say as part of Project NEON, there is also focus on Vocational Rehabilitation on rate restructuring and how to offer training around customized employment. She expressed her gratitude for Project NEON and the work of the Council. She concluded her report by announcing there will be an overview of council members' work in their respective agencies moving forward so that each agency and how it fits with Employment First.

## Goodwill Presentation

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Member, Amy Luttrell, provided information about the efforts Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB) are making towards Employment First. At the end of the presentation, guest, Johnny Collett, made the comment that he is the new chair of the Education Attainment Committee on KWIB and expressed gratitude for working with the KWIB. Discussion was held regarding changes to WIOA. Although those changes passed the House, there has not been written confirmation or details. Council member, Amanda Owen, asked if she could have permission to embed Amy's KWIB slides particularly around Employment First. It was said that Amanda would need to contact KWIB staff, specifically, Alisher Burikhanov. Council member, Todd Coffey, asked how the Employment First Council can align KWIB committees to avoid duplication. Amy Luttrell said the intent is to have someone serve on both Councils in attempt to avoid this issue. Cora McNabb said there are continuous conversation with the Chamber of Commerce on how to better build on initial relationships with them. She provided an example of the Chamber sponsored employer summit last year. Cora explained there

would be another event in the planning stages for 2024 in conjunction with the Chamber. Council member, Todd Coffey, continued by asking if meetings are open to the public. It was confirmed that all KWIB meetings are open. Amy Luttrell said individuals are welcome to become a member on the KWIB committees. PowerPoint will be sent to the Council.

## Kentucky Council on Autism Presentation

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Member, Tal Curry, provided a presentation on the efforts the Kentucky Council on Autism is making towards Employment First and an overview of the work the Kentucky Advisory Council on Autism's initiatives. A new autism diagnosis resource sheet was shown in the presentation as well as information regarding the Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW). Extensive discussion was had regarding first person language and the difference between identity first language. These can be found on their website. PowerPoint will be sent to the Council.

## Committee Reports

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### *Advocacy and Education Committee Report*

Chair, Amanda Owen, provided the Advocacy and Education report. She stated the committee has been working diligently on developing PowerPoint slides. She reminded council members that she has slides developed and the goal is to have the presentation branded by Employment First. She stated the committee continues to collect information and resources and she encouraged other committees to send in any resources available to place in the Council Dropbox. She stated the committee is not trying to create more resources but rather collect them so that parents, employers, self-advocates, etc. will be able to find them in one place. She also stated the committee has been working on email templates as well. Chair of the Council, Katie Wolf Whaley said the request for resources from council members will be in the follow-up email after the meeting. Amanda said to send resources via email to Pepper Caudill so she can coordinate those and gather up the information. She stated her next step would be to collaborate with other committees and concluded her report.

### *Employer Education and Engagement Committee Report*

Chair, Merry-Reid Sheffer, provided the Employer Education and Engagement report. Merry-Reid was pleased to announce Employment First Council's collaboration with KYRETAIN on their Lunch N' Learn Series. Merry-Reid then announced the first

Employer Lunch N' Learn Series in partnership with KYRETAIN would be launching on April 23rd, 2024, at noon. She stated the topic would be from the South ADA Center in which Barry Whaley and Pam Williamson would be presenting. Merry-Reid said initially the committee wanted to develop their own. However, after much thought, she said, rather than recreate the wheel, a partnership would be best suited. She explained the session would be virtual and she posted the information in the chat for council members. She stated in May a presentation will be held and the topic will be provided by KYOVR Employer Services Branch Manager, Dean Wilson-Kimble. She expressed thanks to the committee members for this assistance with the series. She said the committee will continue to suggest topics and presenter ideas to KYRETAIN. Merry-Reid then encouraged council members to send in any ideas they may have for topics to the committee. She then reported the committee is working on a few documents on how to engage employers. Merry-Reid announced there would be a Coalition for Workforce Diversity meeting for Employers which would be held on May 8th, 2024 and concluded her report. Council member, Frank Huffman, asked about the summit information the Chamber of Commerce hosts and asked for the difference between the employer luncheon and the summit. Committee Chair, Merry-Reid Sheffer, explained the Coalition for Workforce Diversity would be hosting the event to celebrate employer partnerships and that there would be different agencies present to speak with employers. She explained she would be in attendance along with a guest from Brown-Foreman to speak on customized employment. Chair of the Council, Katie Wolf Whaley, mentioned to Frank he could be referring to the Inclusive Workforce Summit that would be held in the fall Chamber of Commerce.

### *Provider Capacity Committee Report*

Chair, Jeff White, provided the Provider Capacity report. He began by stating the committee has no action items but more of information sharing. He began by showcasing a map that was created entitled, "Capacity of Kentucky: Supported Employment Services". He expressed gratitude to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation's Supported Employment Consultants for collecting the data to construct the map. Jeff explained the intent of the map is to see where the state has sufficient capacity for services, a marginal need, or a critical need. He further explained the map will be updated quarterly. As they begin to analyze the data, there has been some areas of the state that are improving. This does not include VR services provided directly by VR staff. He showcased another map entitled, "Potential Waiver Participant: Demand for Supported Employment". Jeff stated the map is based upon the number of working-age waiver participants ages 16-65. He then said there is a

significant demand in Jefferson County, Kentucky where over 1,000+ who are waiver participants in this county who wish to work in the community. There is a demand for VR services delivered through Community Rehabilitation Programs, he stated. Jeff then showcased the Kentucky Occupational Outlook slide from 2021 – 2031. He provided an example of the Green River and the future demand overview for 2022 – 2027 and said this might give individuals an idea of what types of jobs are available in each county and what the estimated entry level wage/salary is for each category. He continued to report the committee is working on developing a workbook as a guide for providers to assist them with developing a policy and procedures manual. Jeff also said long-term goals for the committee include exploring ways to promote the career of Employment Specialist. He concluded his report by encouraging attendees to view the many resources from KWIB.

### *Transition Committee Report*

Co-Chair, Frank Huffman, provided the Transition report. He stated Chair Jessica Beaven discussed with him on ways they could receive transition success stories. The committee, he said, would be working on gathering those stories. He concluded his report by encouraging attendees to send those to him and Jessica and that he was open to suggestions and ideas. Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley encouraged members to send in positive transition stories and what contributed to their success. KYOVR Branch Manager, Michelle Cobb, suggested to Frank that an email be composed requesting transition success stories from the OVR staff who may have releases in hopes of having greater success with collecting the stories for the committee. She said she would be glad to share it.

### *Public.Policy.Committee.Report*

Chair, Diana Merzweiler, provided the Public Policy report. She began by stating the proposed definition change of competitive integrated employment was decided upon by this committee to bring to the full council. She explained the committee has made the recommendation for the state definition of competitive integrated employment to align more with the federal definition. She directed attendees to view the proposed recommendation. Chair of the Council Katie Wolf Whaley directed council members to page 48 of their meeting packets for review. Committee Chair, Diana Merzweiler, expressed gratitude for fellow council member, Andrew Johnson, for his diligent work and research. The Public Policy Committee recommends amending Kentucky KRS 151B.211 to 151B.214, the definition of competitive integrated employment, to align

with the United States Federal definition as follows:

- (1)** For the purposes of Sections 1 to 4 of this Act KRS.707B;877.to.707B;870, "competitive integrated employment?" consistent with the definition in section 3 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (Public Law 111-267, 86 U.S.C. § 101) and consistent with federal regulation means work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis (including self\_employment);
- ~~(a) — Earning compensation at or above minimum wage and comparable to the customary rate paid by the employer to employees without disabilities performing similar duties and with similar training and experience;~~
  - ~~(b) — Receiving the same level of benefits provided to other employees without disabilities in similar positions;~~
  - ~~(c) — Working at a location where the employee interacts with other individuals without disabilities; and~~
  - ~~(d) — Receiving opportunities for advancement when appropriate similar to other employees without disabilities in similar positions.~~
- (a)** For which an individual;
- 1.** Is compensated at a rate that;
    - i.** shall be not less than the higher of the rate specified in section 2(a)(7) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (86 U.S.C. 862(a)(7)) or the rate specified in the applicable State or local minimum wage law; and
    - ii.** is not less than the customary rate paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who are similarly situated in similar occupations by the same employer and who have similar training, experience, and skills; or
    - iii.** in the case of an individual who is self-employed, yields an income that is comparable to the income received by other individuals who are not individuals with disabilities and who are self-employed in similar occupations or on similar tasks and who have similar training, experience, and skills; and
  - 2.** is eligible for the level of benefits provided to other employees;
- (b)** That is at a location where the employee interacts with other persons who are not individuals with disabilities (not including supervisory personnel or individuals who are providing services to such employee) to the same extent that individuals who are not individuals with disabilities and who are in comparable positions interact with other persons; and
- (c)** As appropriate, presents opportunities for advancement that are similar to those for other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who have similar positions;

Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to amend the definition of competitive integrated employment in the Employment First Legislation so that it is consistent with the federal regulations. Member, Amanda Owen made the motion to accept the amended changes brought forth by the committee. Member, David Allgood provided a second. No discussion. Motion passed. Diana Merzweiler then explained that the committee continues to reexamine the policy reviews that were completed by committee members in the last year. She expressed thanks to Jeff White for his work on the reviews on the Michelle P. Waiver and Supports for Community Living (SCL). She concluded her report by stating she hopes to turn these reviews into action items.

## Public Comment

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None.

## Adjournment

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member, Amy Luttrell made the motion to adjourn. Member, Tal Curry provided a second to the motion. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned.

## Next Meeting Date

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Friday, July 12, 2024  
1:00pm – 3:00pm  
Hybrid Format  
Kentucky Transportation Cabinet  
200 Mero Street  
Conference Room C-107  
Frankfort, KY



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**Andy Beshear**

Governor

**Jamie Link**

Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

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# Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting Minutes

July 12, 2024

1:00pm – 03:00pm

Zoom

Meeting ID: 831 4350 9206

## Members Present

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Legislative Liaison, Diana Merzweiler, Bill Bates, Amanda Friend, Johnny Callebs, Todd Coffey, Tal Curry, Frank Huffman, Jason Wheatley as proxy for Gretta Hylton, Amy Luttrell, Cora McNabb, Margaret Lopresto as proxy for Lori Norton, Amanda Friend, Amanda Owen, Larry Taylor, Jeff White, Andrew Johnson, Rebecca Wilson, Vice-Chair, Morgan Turner, and Merry Reid Sheffer.

## Members Absent

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Jessica Beaven, Staci Cain, Jeff Edwards, Dawn Gardner, Leslie Hoffman, David Allgood, Annette Jett, and Robert Taylor.

## Staff Present

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Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) Administrator, Nanci Howard, KYOVR, KYOVR Florence Branch Manager, Michelle Cobb, KYOVR Employer Services Branch Manager, Deana Wilson-Kimble, KYOVR CRP/SE Branch Manager, Ron O’Hair, KYOVR Staff Assistant, Betty Whittaker, KYOVR Division Director, Holly Hendricks, KYOVR Deputy Executive Director, Susie Edwards, and KYOVR Assistant Director, Jonathan White.

## Guest(s) Present

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Kimberly Wickert, KY RETAIN, Cathy Anderson, Bernadette Leveridge, Dr. Luv Tesha Robertson, Margaret Lopresto, Heather Wood, Justin Jeter, Melanie Tyner Wilson, Johnny Collett, Stacia Cole, Johnathan Carr, Alisha Clark, and Tracy Belfield.

## Interpreter

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Tia Henson

## Roll Call

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Roll call was taken. It was determined there was a quorum.

## Staff Report

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Administrator, Nanci Howard, began her report by announcing that the meeting materials would no longer be distributed through the mail but rather via email. She concluded her report by providing virtual housekeeping rules and upcoming committee dates for Council members. She highlighted openings Vacancies on the council: two business industry and labor, and one chamber of commerce. She mentioned Council members to present their roles in future meetings. She Stated that administrative specialist position is vacant and in the process of being filled and Investigating exhibit signage for the Employment First Council. Inclusive Workforce Summit on September 30th at Marriott Griffin Gate Resort. She thanked the committees for their diligent work throughout the year.

## Approval of Minutes

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Council of the Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley directed members to the meeting minutes from the April 12th, 2024, meeting. She called for a motion to accept the minutes as written. Amanda Owen made the motion to accept the April 12th, 2024, council minutes. Second, Diana Merzweiler. No opposition. Motion carries.

## Chair Report

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## *National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (Project NEON) Update*

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, provided an update on Project NEON and the efforts made through the technical assistance award grant. She began by stating, the lead Subject Matter Expert (SME), Karen Lee, has been working with the committees and providing support and guidance to each committee Chair and Council leadership. She then announced there will be one-on-one meetings with Karen Lee and each Chair of the committees to discuss how the charge of the Council and Committee goals coincide with the Strategic Plan. Katie continued to say as part of Project NEON, SME, Steve Blanks, will present a three-part webinar series, “Enhancing Employer Engagement”, sponsored by the Employment First Council and organized by the Employer Education and Engagement Committee. This series is aimed at increasing capacity among disability employment providers in better connecting with businesses and representing job seekers in a way that allows the business to see the benefits to hiring candidates with disabilities. The first webinar was held on June 20th with 87 attendees and the next webinars will be held July 18th and August 15th. She said there is also focus on an effort to increase Kentucky’s capacity for customized employment. Project NEON will cover costs for bringing in key-note speaker, Trish Jones-Parkins, for the Kentucky 2024 APSE Conference. She expressed gratitude for Project NEON and the work of the Council.

## *Request for Letter of Support Approval*

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, informed the Council that we recently received a request for a letter of support on behalf of the Human Development Institute's proposal for the Disability Innovation Fund Model Demonstration Project. This proposal aims at increasing opportunities for competitive integrated employment in new ways and reaching often underserved groups. The Executive Committee met and voted to approve submission of this letter.

## *Presentation on Employment First*

Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley reflected on her recent presentation about Employment First at a statewide VR staff meeting. She emphasized the importance of collaboration among council members and the need for a unified approach to employment initiatives. She plans to share a brief overview of Employment First and its significance. Katie shared a video created by council members illustrating the meaning of Employment First. She emphasized the importance of competitive, integrated

employment for individuals with disabilities. The video highlighted the need for respect, opportunity, and the value that individuals with disabilities bring to the workforce. She discussed Kentucky's employment statistics, noting that the state ranks low in employment for individuals with disabilities. She emphasized the need for the council's work to address the labor gap and high unemployment rates, particularly among youth exiting high school. Katie presented statistics indicating that a significant percentage of individuals with disabilities express a desire to work but face barriers to accessing employment opportunities. Katie stressed the importance of the Employment First Council in advocating for integrated employment services and addressing systemic issues. She also discussed the need for a cultural shift within agencies to prioritize employment for individuals with disabilities. She emphasized the importance of welcoming individuals into the system, rather than acting as gatekeepers, to ensure that those expressing a desire to work receive the necessary support.

Katie also highlighted the role of pre-employment transition services in schools and stressed the need for collaboration between educational institutions and employment services. She encouraged the council to share information about available resources and services to help individuals navigate the transition from school to work. She concluded by reiterating the importance of Employment First as a primary option for individuals with disabilities and emphasized the need for ongoing conversations within agencies about employment. She stressed the necessity of creating pathways for individuals to access employment support.

## Kentucky Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities (CCDD) Presentation

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Executive Director of the Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities, Johnny Callebs Provided a presentation on that the efforts and overview of the Council's vision, mission, and structure. He mentioned about the DD Network and its components: DD Councils, Protection and Advocacy organizations, and University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. He discussed about that "New project" and mentioned that "Never Too Early" focusing on employment for young children with developmental disabilities. He shared resources from the completed transportation initiative with the council.

## Committee Reports

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### *Advocacy and Education Committee Report*

Chair, Amanda Owen, provided the Advocacy and Education report. She stated the committee has been working diligently on development of a centralized website for resources. She focused on Plan to create a FAQ section for different target audiences and encourage to submit additional resources to be added to the website and she's ensured that the QR code on the approved sheet directs users to the updated website. She mentioned that she trying to create more resources but rather collect them so that parents, employers, self-advocates, etc. will be able to find them in one place. She also stated the committee has been working on email templates as well. Amanda said to send more resources via email to Nanci Howard so she can coordinate those and gather up the information. She stated her next step would be to collaborate with other committees and concluded her report. Chair of the Council, Katie Wolf Whaley encourage committee Member to put their input for Development and growth. She stated the committee has been working diligently on developing PowerPoint slides. She stated the committee continues to collect information and resources and She concluded her report by encouraged other committees to submit additional resources to be added to the website.

### *Employer Education and Engagement Committee Report*

Chair of the Council, Katie Wolf Whaley, provided an update on behalf of Merry-Reid Sheffer regarding the Employer Education and Engagement report due to Merry's early departure. The Employment First Council continues to collaborate and co-sponsor, with KY RETAIN, the monthly Employer Seminar Series. She expressed gratitude to Kimberly Wickert and Betty Whittaker of KY RETAIN for their partnership. Upcoming webinars are:

July: Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers

August: Employers as Change

### *Provider Capacity Committee Report*

Chair, Jeff White, provided the Provider Capacity report. He began by stating the committee has no action items today but shared information around the need for increased disability employment provider capacity in our systems. He expressed concerned regarding the challenges meeting the demand for services and that the

committee is looking forward to the potential changes in the Supported Employment service fee memorandum from the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. These changes may be a clear action to increase capacity among providers. Jeff White mentioned the committee efforts to streamline the handoff of services between OVR and Waiver. They are working on developing a provider workbook to assist provider agencies with the progress of their policies and procedures, in order to help agencies add employment to their service offerings and to do so in a quality manner. Jeff concluded his report by announcing he will continue his conversations with Medicaid about ways to address policy changes without regulatory or waiver changes.

### *Public Policy Committee Report*

Chair, Diana Merzweiler, provided the Public Policy report. She began by informing the Council of a meeting with Education and Labor Cabinet's Executive Director of Legislative Services, Jorden Jones, Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, KYOVR Executive Director, Cora McNabb, and Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Nanci Howard. She said the group discussed the Council's recommendation to align the state's definition of competitive integrated employment with the federal definition and determine next steps in putting forward this recommendation. The recommendation is at the Cabinet's Legislative Priority List and there was no date given for a follow-up, but that Jorden would follow-up with OVR staff once it gets closer to session.

### *Transition Committee Report*

Co-Chair, Frank Huffman, provided the Transition report. He stated ongoing efforts to find success stories for employment of people with disabilities. He expressed he is having difficulty finding success stories. Frank mentioned that he is participating in the Olmstead work that addresses transportation issues and provides personal experiences and concerns about transportation barriers to employment.

## Public Comment

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Co-Chair, Frank Huffman was raised question about transportation issues and asked if the Council had a Transportation Committee. Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, stated in the development of the committees the idea was that all committees would tackle the barriers to transportation. he asked if OVR have come up with any solutions and recognizes it is a huge problem for everyone. Jeff White stated transportation is available through OVR and waiver services but wrought with so many elements and must be addressed by a case-by-case basis. Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, suggested some

resources to Frank and referred him to Maria Kemplin. Council member, Johnny Callebs suggested working with the state Olmstead’s work team on Transportation. Katie will send an email introduction to him and Carolyn Wheeler to discuss his transportation issues. No further discussion was held regarding a transportation committee on the Council due to other entities having those work teams at this time.

## Adjournment

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting with a reminder of the next meeting date.

## Next Meeting Date

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Friday, October 11, 2024  
1:00pm – 3:00pm  
Hybrid Format  
Kentucky Transportation Cabinet  
200 Mero Street  
Conference Room C-107  
Frankfort, KY



## Kentucky Employment First Council

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**Andy Beshear**

Governor

**Jamie Link**

Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

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# Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting Minutes

October 11, 2024

1:00pm – 03:00pm

Zoom

Meeting ID: 831 4350 9206

## Members Present

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Legislative Liaison, Diana Merzweiler, Bill Bates, Amanda Friend, Johnny Callebs, Tal Curry, Frank Huffman, Jason Wheatley as proxy for Gretta Hylton, Cora McNabb, Lori Norton, Amanda Friend, Robert Larry Taylor, Jeff White, Andrew Johnson, Rebecca Wilson, Vice-Chair, David Allgood, Annette Jett.

## Members Absent

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Jessica Beaven, Dawn Gardner, Staci Cain, Jeff Edwards, Leslie Hoffman, Amanda Owen, Todd Coffey, Vice-Chair, Morgan Turner, Merry Reid Sheffer, and Amy Luttrell.

## Staff Present

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Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) Administrator, Nanci Howard, KYOVR Florence Branch Manager, Michelle Cobb, KYOVR Employer Services Branch Manager, Deana Wilson-Kimble, KYOVR CRP/SE Branch Manager, Ron O’Hair, KYOVR Staff Assistant, Betty Whittaker, KYOVR Deputy Executive Director, Susie Edwards, KYOVR Assistant Director II, Kristen Beach Administrative Specialist Senior, Anu Kumari.

## Guest(s) Present

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Susan Brown, Cathy Anderson, Tracy Belfield, Althea Duff, Kimberly Wickert, Shelly Durbin, Elizabeth Thompson, Dana Papas, Dondra Merideth, Trista Atwell, Melanie Tyner Wilson, Johnathan Carr, Kayla Fosberg, Johnny Collett, and Melissa Marvel.

## Interpreter

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Tia Henson and Christina Vice

## Roll Call

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Administrative staff, Anu Kumari, provided the roll call and determined there was a quorum.

## Welcome/Announcements/Staff Report

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KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, welcomed everyone to the third, quarterly Employment First Council meeting. She announced there are four vacancies on the council: three business, industry, and labor representatives, and one member from the Chamber of Commerce. She continued to announce that all appointments are still pending at the Governor's Office but that the Education and Labor Cabinet's Legislative Services are working on receiving those appointments. She also announced there are other Councils within the agency who are awaiting appointment as well. Additionally, Nanci highlighted the upcoming next committee dates for the rest of the year and encouraged council members, guests and staff, to attend committee meetings. She continued by saying if anyone would like to attend one of the committee meetings, please get in touch with her or one of the respective committee chairs. Nanci then announced staff will send standing committee meeting invitations for 2025 after the meeting. Additionally, she stated there are two council members to provide presentations today on the role they play on the council and how they are furthering the message of Employment First through their work. The following two speakers will present during the meeting. Those individuals are:

- Lori Norton reporting on the IPS program.
- Jason Wheatley reporting on special programs within the Kentucky Department of Education.

Nanci mentioned there is exhibit signage for the Employment First Council. She informed council members that outreach materials could be borrowed for their use. She stated the signage and outreach materials were used at the Inclusive Workforce Summit on September 30, 2024, in Lexington, KY at Marriott Griffin Gate and that she was able to reach approximately 360 attendees at the event and there were 15+ exhibitors present as well. She also attended the Kentucky APSE Conference on September 9th and 10th at the Campbell House Conference Center in Lexington, KY, where she did not exhibit but noted mentions of Employment First were prevalent throughout the conference. Ms. Howard concluded her report by discussing the annual report. She noted a draft of the annual report was sent to all council members prior to the meeting on October 3rd. Nanci requested that members be prepared to discuss any changes or suggestions at the end of the meeting. The report is due to the Education and Labor Cabinet on November 1st, 2024, and to the Governor's office by December 1st, 2024, as per KRS 151B.211-214.

## Approval of Minutes

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Council of the Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley directed members to the meeting minutes from the July 12th, 2024, meeting. She called for a motion to accept the minutes as written. Cora McNabb made the motion to accept the July 12th, 2024, Council minutes. Second, Frank Huffman. No opposition. Motion carried.

## Chair Report

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Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley provided a brief report, she is emphasized the importance of addressing both disability and workforce issues. Chair, Katie expressed excitement about the council's participation in the Inclusive Workforce Summit and the positive impact of having a panel discussion on supported employment. Katie mentioned the upcoming Disability Hiring Academy starting in 2025 and highlighted the council's charge to improve the disability support systems and increase employment numbers for individuals with disabilities. She stated that they would be adding a standing agenda item to committee meetings to capture information about other events council members are involved in, which would help in documenting outreach efforts related to disability employment.

## IPS Program and Employment First

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Lori Norton, the IPS Supported Employment Project Director for the University of Kentucky, was introduced to presentation on IPS. She expressed her excitement about being part of the Employment First Council and shared her background in supported employment. Lori began discussing the IPS model, which focuses on helping individuals with serious mental illness find and maintain employment. She highlighted the importance of starting IPS services for youth at age 16 and presented statistics indicating that while 66% of people with serious mental illness want to work and less than 20% are actually employed. She noted that before IPS was introduced in Kentucky in 2010, the employment rate for individuals receiving services was less than 9.65%. She explained that IPS represents a shift from a medical model to a recovery model, emphasizing that employment is central to recovery. She discussed the eight guiding principles of IPS, starting with the principle of client choice, which promotes zero exclusion based on readiness factors or diagnoses. She highlighted that everyone is encouraged to consider work, regardless of their circumstances. The principle of rapid job search was also emphasized, where employment specialists engage with clients to find jobs within 30 days of expressing interest. She explained that every job experience is viewed as a learning opportunity, allowing individuals to grow and adapt. Lori described the importance of targeted job development, where employment specialists build relationships with employers to understand their hiring preferences and match them with client interests. She also discussed the significance of individualized preferences in guiding employment decisions and addressed concerns about how employment might affect benefits, emphasizing the need for tailored information to help clients navigate these issues. She compared the unique features of IPS to traditional supported employment, highlighting the collaborative approach within mental health treatment teams. She provided an overview of the growth of IPS in Kentucky since its inception, noting that it is now embedded within all 14 community health centers and has expanded to serve 78 counties. She mentioned ongoing efforts to secure funding for long-term support services for IPS. The organization is currently working with two sites, three of which specifically serve youth through the IPS model, employing specialists dedicated to youth teams. Since its inception in 2010-2023, 27,675 people were served, the program has expanded from six counties to 78 counties and has partnered with seven outside agencies beyond community mental health centers. Efforts have been made to collaborate with Medicaid on a state plan amendment to fund long-term supports for supported employment, which has been a significant gap since the program's launch in Kentucky. The inclusion of supported education in the state plan amendment is also being pursued, as it is a crucial

component of IPS, aiming to provide educational support for individuals interested in various educational paths. IPS has also expanded to include two sites in Kentucky, one in collaboration with a net jet focusing on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and another pilot program with community care in the Lisbon town area. She expressed excitement about pioneering research on implementing IPS for this demographic, as there is currently a lack of research in this area. She invites attendees to reach out for more information about IPS and expresses enthusiasm for sharing the positive developments in the program. Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley asked committee members for any comments or questions for Lori Norton Presentation and there is no question.

## Kentucky Department of Education and Employment First

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Jason Wheatley proxy of Gretta Hylton provided a brief introduction of himself and his role within the Department of Education, specifically in the Office of Special Education and Early Learning. He began to discuss the philosophy of transition education, emphasizing that the purpose of education is to prepare students for adulthood. He announced that the Transition Education Unit aims to ensure that students with disabilities receive the necessary support to achieve these outcomes. Jason presented data that tracks post-school outcomes of students with disabilities one year after exiting high school. The data reveals that 18.1% of students were enrolled in higher education, while 57.0% and 72.1% were either enrolled in higher education or competitively employed. However, he reported, approximately 30% of students were not engaged in education or employment. The team is focused on improving these outcomes through various initiatives. He announced the team has partnered with the National Technical Assistance Center to leverage research on transition education and have identified 22 predictors of post-school success to guide their efforts. He stated a self-assessment tool has been developed to evaluate transition programming and practices at the school and district levels, encouraging collaboration among internal and external stakeholders. Jason announced that Kentucky has received federal grants to implement two programs aimed at improving post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. The first program, Kentucky Transition 360, focuses on building partnerships across systems to support students, while the second program, Kentucky Transition 360 for Educators, targets professional development for educators. The Kentucky Transition 360 program will employ community-based family transition mentors to provide support and mentorship to families navigating the transition process. This initiative aims to foster strong relationships and provide valuable resources to families. The second program, Kentucky Transition 360 for Educators, is

designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of educators across various roles, including general education and vocational teachers. It will feature a three-tiered model of professional learning, including online modules, in-person boot camps, and a community of practice. Jason concluded his report by expressing excitement about the potential for collaboration and improvement in transition services for students with disabilities in Kentucky. Council Chair, Katie asked members for any questions or comments for Jason. Annette Jett raised a question regarding what type of mentors would be considered to participate. Jason replied they are planning to do job advertisement in upcoming weeks already are working on the structure.

## Committee Reports

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### *Advocacy and Education Committee Report*

On behalf of Chair Amanda Owen, Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley mentioned the committee is currently revising an FAQ sheet around Employment First, and a draft was seen recently.

### *Employer Education and Engagement Committee Report*

On behalf of Chair Merry Reid Sheffer, Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley mentioned the upcoming Employer Seminar Series for October and November. In October the webinar will highlight National Disability Employment Awareness Month with “Ways Employers Can Engage, Include and Amplify Workers in the Recruitment and Retention Process”, presented by RETAIN Kentucky and Employment First. Katie provided a LINK to join the presentation. She said she will present and share insights on how to elevate the workforce through the contributions of people with disabilities.

The webinar will be held October 16, 2024, Time: 12:00-12:45 EST. The November topic for the series will focus on respectful language regarding people with disabilities and scheduled for November 12, 2024, at 12:00-12:45 EST, she provided a link. She stated that Bev Harp and Laura Butler would be presenting, and it would be entitled, “To “with” or Not to “with”.”

### *Provider Capacity Committee Report*

Committee Chair, Jeff White, provided the Provider Capacity Committee report. He began by discussing the ongoing monitoring work to the Provider Capacity map that will be updated quarterly. The map presented to the Council will be updated and Jeff

anticipates some degree of change due to the recent work of the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation with rate changes and restructuring. He announced another map will be updated to reflect waiver participants who wish to receive employment services. This map would show the potential demand for employment services among waiver participants. Both maps will continue to be updated and shared with the Council. Mr. White continued to report the committee's plan to develop a Provider Workbook has been halted due to the rate changes from KYOVR. He explained the Provider Workbook would assist Providers to address the policies they need to develop in order to become KYOVR providers and waiver providers. The Committee is looking forward to working on this now that there are expectations and forms are in place. He announced six providers has indicated the desire to become both KYOVR and waiver providers.

There is news regarding the waiver regulations that the Council commented on and deferred this to the Public Policy Committee. Mr. White then turned the discussion to the potential development of a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between KYOVR, Medicaid, and Behavioral Health and possibly extending it to other state agencies such as DAIL and State Guardianship.

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, announced the infographic entitled, "How to Get Help Finding a Job", is now approved and available for distribution. The resource was sent out to the Council prior to the meeting by Administrator, Nanci Howard and is posted on the Employment First website. Katie thanked the committee for their work.

### *Public Policy Committee Report*

Committee Chair, Diana Merzweiler, provided the Public Policy Committee report. She stated at the beginning of the year the committee worked diligently on identifying the correct language needed for the definition of competitive integrated employment to align more with the federal definition. She stated the first quarter, the committee was able to adapt language and full council voted on this language to move forward. She asked for a current update on the progression of the legislative recommendation. Council Member and KYOVR Executive Director, Cora McNabb stated the recommendation is on the Cabinet's list of legislative priorities.

Diana then stated that at the suggestion of Subject Matter Expert, Karen Lee, (Project NEON), the committee continues to make efforts to review policy that are coming up for public comment and make recommendations for change to included employment as an option for those wishing to pursue employment. The committee made

recommendations to Kentucky's 1915(c) Home and Community Based Services Waivers. All recommendations were sent to the full council prior to the meeting and approved by the Executive Committee to submit on the Council's behalf. She also announced the committee is currently reviewing the KDE policies with Allison Johnson and Holly Hendricks with KYOVR policies.

The discussion turned to Council member, Jeff White, who announced he concluded a two-day meeting with all agencies involved with waiver programs along with a consulting company called "Guidehouse". He stated a different there will be a different approach to waiver regulations than in previous years. He explained, in the past, applications for waivers would be received first and the waiver regulations were made to match the waiver documents.

He announced the definition of competitive integrated employment, which came from the Public Policy Committee, is included in the recommendations for the 1915(c) Waivers. He explained that all recommendations are subject to change through provider comment but were accepted without changes or dissention. Also included were changes to the case management regulations which will incorporate the Employment First concept. The Day Training changes were also included. Day training services will have a strong emphasis on career development contain an aspect to prepare for transition into the workplace, including work experiences. He stated he wishes to work proactively before any regulations are published and address provider concerns to make changes before the public comment period. He said what is on the table is changes to the Medicaid Buy-In that provides Medicaid opportunities for individuals who earn above Substantial Gainful Activity. He said changes are attempted to be made to make it more of a work incentive and include it as one of the forms of Medicaid that confer waiver eligibility. He explained the Medicaid Buy in eligibility process. The next steps are dealing with the structure of payments for long-term supports, he said. He stated that mid to late 2025 is the time-table. There was a question in the chat from Council Member, Becky Wilson. She asked, "will there be any name changes with programming alignment?" Jeff White said that not that he is aware of. Jeff then briefly mentioned the ABI waiver and the work that is being done to attempt to look at more of an IPS model rather than traditional due to the therapeutic nature of the needs of that population.

### *Transition Committee Report*

Proxy for Gretta Hylton (KDE), Jason Wheatley, commented there have been discussions in the Transition Committee to review the curriculum for Transition 360 for Educators

and believes the committee wishes to pursue this more and develop a plan on how Employment First can be incorporated into that curriculum. Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, stated the committee is focused on collecting transition success stories and two were highlighted at the previous committee meeting. The committee continues to explore ways on how to share the stories more broadly.

## Annual Report Draft Review and Input

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Administrator, Nanci Howard presented the draft of the 2024 Employment First Council Annual Report, she reminded council members, the annual report draft 1 was sent to them via email on October 3rd soliciting their feedback. The report includes a message from the chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, and addresses council's legislative charge. She stated the committee's accomplishments were highlighted and organized based on the charge of the Council. The report also includes future steps in each section, emphasizing ongoing efforts to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The council's membership structure and meeting logistics are documented, showcasing the frequency of meetings and the work accomplished. The conclusion of the report summarizes the council's efforts and highlights the importance of continued outreach and engagement. Council discussion focused on future outreach activities, with an emphasis on gathering more specific details to list. Chair Katie Wolf Whaley said there are intentions to incorporate outreach efforts across all committees and have it as a standing agenda item moving forward. She continued to say a presentation was made at a joint committee of the legislature, which requested an update on Employment First initiatives and the Kentucky Exceptional Children's Council is scheduled to hold a session on employment and Employment First, highlighting the importance of capturing these activities throughout the year. The goal is to set objectives aimed at increasing points of contact across the state for Employment First information dissemination. There is a desire to measure these outreach efforts in a more structured manner to ensure effectiveness and accountability. Nanci asked for questions and/or suggestions. No questions or feedback from council members was heard. Nanci asked committee members to reach out to her if they see any changes needed to be made and that the first draft of the annual report is due on November 1<sup>st</sup>.

## Public Comment

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No public comment addressed.

## Adjournment

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member, Larry Taylor made the motion to adjourn. Member, Johnny Callebs provided a second to the motion. Members voted. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned. Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

## Next Meeting Date

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Friday, January 10, 2025

1:00pm – 3:00pm

Hybrid Format

Location: TBD