



**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

January 10, 2025

1:00pm – 3:00pm

Zoom

Meeting ID: 837 1773 4370

### Members Present

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Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Legislative Liaison, Diana Merzweiler, Bill Bates, Amanda Friend, Johnny Callebs, Tal Curry, Frank Huffman, Gretta Hylton, Cora McNabb, Lori Norton, Amanda Friend, Robert Larry Taylor, Jeff White, Andrew Johnson, Annette Jett, Amy Luttrell, and Merry Reid Sheffer.

### Members Absent

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Jessica Beaven, Dawn Gardner, Staci Cain, Jeff Edwards, Leslie Hoffman, Todd Coffey, Vice-Chair, Morgan Turner, Rebecca Wilson, and David Allgood.

### 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, KYOVR Assistant Director II, Jonathan White, and KYOVR Division Director, Holly Hendricks.

## Guest(s) Present

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Lilly Kowalski, Cathy Anderson, Tracy Belfield, Kimberly Wickert, Carrie Wedding, Melanie Tyner Wilson, Melanie Lybarger, Zachary Sappenfield, Jason Wheatley, Jason Cole, Stacia Cole, Megan Coleman, Truc Pham, Audra Shutt, and Lisa Carrico.

## Interpreters

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Tia Henson and Tara Eversole

## Roll Call

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Administrator, Nanci Howard provided the roll call and determined there was a quorum.

## Welcome

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KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard and Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley welcomed everyone to the meeting. The agenda was reviewed by all participants.

## Staff Report

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### *Project NEON*

KYOVR Administrator Nanci Howard provided an update on Project NEON (National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network). The council has collaborated with Project NEON for the past two years, benefiting from the technical assistance and guidance provided through a grant funded by the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and their project management partners, EconSys. The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation been awarded 200 hours of technical assistance for 2025. A virtual NEON Core State call is scheduled for January 23rd at 10:00 a.m., with participation from EconSys, ODEP, OVR, and interested council members. Nanci stated if there are council members or guests wishing to participate in the work of Project NEON, to contact her or Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley.

### *Annual Report*

Administrator, Nanci Howard stated that the Employment First Council submitted its annual report before the December 1st, 2024, deadline (as per KRS 151B.211-214), The report has been accepted by the Governor's office

## *Upcoming 2025 Meetings*

Administrator, Nanci Howard stated that invitations for upcoming 2025 committee meetings have been sent out via email. She stated if anyone had not received their committee or full council meeting invitations to contact her or Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley.

## *Employment First Council Committees and Member Term Expirations*

Nanci Howard began by highlighting the five Employment First Council committees: Advocacy and Education, Employer Education and Engagement, Public Policy, Provider Capacity, Transition, and the Executive Committee

She encouraged council members to actively participate in committee meetings, noting that most of the council's work occurs within these committees. She also invited anyone interested in contributing to contact the council for involvement opportunities.

She discussed upcoming term expirations in October 2025, noting four current vacancies on the council. Two members are serving until successors are appointed, and three additional vacancies exist in the areas of business, industry, labor, and the Chamber of Commerce. These appointments are pending approval from the Governor's Office. To address these expirations, Nanci stated she plans to reach out to council members whose terms are ending to discuss their interest in continuing to serve. She will collect applications and resumes for submission to the Governor's Office and emphasized the importance of timely submissions. She shared her screen to display a list of members whose terms are expiring, noting that many will need to resubmit their applications and resumes. She committed to contacting these members to guide them through the process and noted that anyone can apply to serve by use of the Board and Commission website. Nanci concluded her report by inviting questions and suggestions. No questions were raised.

## **Approval of Minutes**

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Council of the Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley directed members to the meeting minutes from the October 11th, 2024, full council, quarterly meeting. She called for a motion to accept the minutes as written. **Larry Taylor made the motion to accept the October 11th, 2024, Council minutes. Second, Diana Merzweiler. No opposition. Motion carried.**

## Chair Report

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### *2024 Annual Report and Future Goals*

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley began her report by thanking attendees and acknowledging the submission of the 2024 Annual Report by Administrator Nanci Howard. The report, emailed to council members on December 20th, highlights the year's accomplishments, goals and future steps. She reported that committees are preparing for Project NEON 2025. The technical assistance granted of 200 hours will provide additional technical assistance to support efforts in increasing employment rates. Katie highlighted updates to the new rate structure and commented it is a positive step forward.

### *Transition Committee Chair Vacancy*

Katie announced the need for a new Chair and Co-Chair for the Transition Committee. Jessica Beaven and Frank Huffman are stepping down from the Transition Committee, on the Council. Katie expressed gratitude for their service and noted that the new Transition Committee Chair must be a governor-appointed council member. Attendees were encouraged to consider stepping into this leadership role. She opened the floor for volunteers. There were no volunteers from the floor so the Chair will serve as interim of the Transition Committee until the April Quartey Council meeting.

### *Kentucky's Olmstead Plan and Survey*

Katie Wolf Whaley announced the Human Development Institute's initiative to gather input on Kentucky's Olmstead Plan. She provided a link to a survey regarding the Olmstead Plan and its implications for Kentucky. She announced the survey would be open until January 15th, 2025, seeks input from all Kentuckians, particularly those with disabilities, their families, and friends. Katie concluded her report by passing to Amanda Owen to continue the discussion on the roles of various agencies in aligning with employment first principles.

## Employment First: The Provider Perspective

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### *Puzzle's Pieces Employment First Approach*

Puzzle Pieces, Inc.

A non-profit organization supporting over 400 individuals with disabilities. Founded 12 years ago and is a 501(c)(3) non-profit.

#### Employment First Approach

Dedicated to the Employment First approach, focusing on getting individuals with disabilities into the workforce.

#### Training and Services

Emphasize their commitment to an 'Employment First' approach, and they will provide an overview of their training methods, including the internal methods as well.

#### Service Offered by Puzzle Pieces

Employment specialists work to promote the Employment First initiative and help identify barriers to employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. While services mainly target individuals with intellectual disabilities, a wide range of support is available for others.

#### Programs Provided

Vocational rehabilitation services to help individuals prepare for and find jobs. Pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) to help youth with disabilities transition into the workforce. Adult vocational programming to help develop work-related skills. New college program developed in partnership with vocational rehabilitation and a local college to help individuals with disabilities attend college and pursue higher education.

### ***New Program for Students with Autism at Community College***

#### Program Overview

Launched in fall 2024 to support students with autism in community college. Focuses on integrating Employment First thinking into academics. Helps autistic graduates find and maintain suitable jobs.

#### Success and Impact

Over 130 individuals with disabilities have been placed in local jobs. Success is attributed to a strong Employment First mindset across all services.

#### Community Education and Resources

A coalition formed in 2019 to educate HR professionals, businesses, and the community on disability employment opportunities. Uses resources like Kentucky RETAIN's "Lunch and Learns" to spread awareness.

#### 2025 Future Goals and "AIM" Approach

Emphasizes addressing potential biases within staff to create a more supportive environment.

## *Day Training Program: Employment For Individuals with Disabilities*

### Reevaluating Day Programs

Advocated for a new approach where skill-building happens alongside employment, rather than as a requirement beforehand.

Called for changes in Day Training Programs and other services to support this shift.

### Shared Responsibility in Skill Development

Highlighted that both service providers and employers should work together to help individuals build skills.

Stressed that individuals with disabilities deserve opportunities to work, and employers should play an active role in training them.

### Addressing Employment Barriers

Identified the current requirement of skill mastery before employment as a major barrier.

Urged for this issue to be addressed to create more inclusive job opportunities.

## *Residential Services: Employment for Individuals with Disabilities*

Amanda Owen discussed the importance of shifting mindsets regarding employment for individuals with disabilities.

### Changing Mindsets About Employment

Emphasized that behavioral challenges should not prevent individuals with disabilities from having job opportunities.

Advocated for proactive strategies to manage behaviors while supporting employment goals.

Stressed the importance of connecting skill-building activities to future jobs, even for young individuals (e.g., 14-year-olds).

### Addressing Common Employment Barriers

Safety concerns and the misconception that 24-hour supervision is always necessary. Living support needs do not mean someone is incapable of working.

The false belief that individuals whose basic needs (shelter, food, clothing) are met lack motivation for employment.

### Reframing Employment as More Than Just Financial Gain

Highlighted the self-worth, purpose, and independence that come from having a job. Encouraged shifting perspectives to recognize the intrinsic value of employment.

### Practical Strategies for an "Employment-First" Mindset

Linking household chores to future job tasks.

Encouraging exploration and participation outside the home.

### Key Barriers to Employment & Solutions

Transportation challenges - Example: A grant-funded program providing driver simulation training to improve transportation options.

Guardians' mindsets - Encouraging more employment-focused thinking.

Limitations in the education system - Addressing gaps in job readiness programs.

Employer education gaps - Raising awareness about hiring individuals with disabilities.

### *Addressing Barriers to Employment for Individuals with Disabilities*

She discussed the barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities.

#### Key Barrier: Guardians' Mindset

Many guardians hesitate to support employment for individuals with disabilities.

#### Addressing the Barrier

Ongoing efforts at the council and state levels focus on sharing success stories and providing financial resources.

#### Education System Challenges

Schools often focus on moving students through grades instead of preparing them for long-term employment.

#### Employer Education

Employers need support to overcome fears and misconceptions about hiring individuals with disabilities.

#### Employment-First Mindset

Even staff within support organizations need training to challenge assumptions and prioritize employment.

#### Power of Storytelling

Sharing real success stories helps shift perspectives on employment for individuals with disabilities.

## Employment-First Approach

Prioritizing employment as the preferred option for individuals with disabilities, with definitions varying by state.

## Integrating Employment-First Mindset

This mindset should be embedded across all services, not just those focused directly on job placement.

## **HB214: House Bill 214 (The Frank Huffman Act)**

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Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley discussed House Bill 214, known as the Frank Huffman Act. The bill was introduced by Frank Huffman, who represents individuals with disabilities on the council. It was passed into law during the 2024 Regular Session, and Governor Andy Beshear held a ceremonial bill signing on November 18, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. in the Capitol Rotunda.

Frank, who also serves on the Employment First Council, discussed the Frank Huffman Act, which defines "developmental disabilities" and outlines state legislative findings on the rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Unfortunately, the law was altered after its passage, making its enforcement currently impossible.

## **Committee Reports**

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### *Advocacy and Education*

Committee Chair, Amanda Owen presented the Advocacy and Education committee's work on creating FAQs about Employment First, targeting various audiences (guardians, professionals, self-advocates). A Google Doc containing a rough draft of these FAQs has been shared to the Council. The committee is seeking council review and input. Amanda requested that each committee chair review the document and provide feedback during their next meetings. The goal is to ensure consistency and clarity in messaging about Employment First across the council. She stated that the Advocacy and Education Committee has made significant progress on the document and is aiming to finalize a draft soon. Amanda requested committee members to review the Google Doc, highlighting questions and answers with comments, so the Executive Committee can finalize the document before the next council meeting for approval. Amanda expressed gratitude to the committee members, particularly Katie Wolf Whaley, for their tireless efforts.

## *Employer Education and Engagement*

Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer provided an update on the activities of the Employer Education and Engagement Committee. The committee is assisting Kimberly Wickert in finalizing topics for the employer seminar series.

### Upcoming Seminars

January 14, 2025 (12:00-12:45 PM): Entitled “Trauma-Informed Leadership, Kellie Burke will present on the definition and goals of trauma-informed leadership. The seminar will cover strategies to develop trauma-informed leaders. It will also review how trauma-informed leaders can promote worker mental wellness. SHRM Professional Development Credits are available.

February 18, 2025 (12:00-12:45 PM): Entitled “Resources Employers Can Use to Promote Stay at and Return to Work. Presented by RETAIN Kentucky and Employment First. Elizabeth Thompson and Kimberly Wickert will present this seminar. It will cover resources for employers to help employees stay at work and return to work. Registration and social media posting were shared. The committee encourages organizations and agencies to share these seminar announcements on social media.

### Partnerships and Referrals

Merry Reid Sheffer emphasized that the RETAIN Kentucky and Employment First Council partnership extends beyond the committee. She welcomed referrals to Kimberly Wickert or herself from anyone working with employers or community members.

### Open to Future Suggestions

The committee remains open to suggestions for future projects that align with their interests and available time.

## *Provider Capacity*

Committee Chair, Jeff White provided an update on the Provider Capacity Committee’s.

### Provider Capacity Map Revision

He provided an update on the work of the Provider Capacity Committee in revising the provider capacity map.

The map analyzes the supply and demand for employment services for people with disabilities across Kentucky.

The analysis showed stable employment capacity, but significant variations in demand, ranging from near zero in Robertson County to thousands in Jefferson County. Over 5,000 individuals in the waiver population have expressed interest in community employment.

### Key Barriers Identified

Recent changes to the OVR rate structure and fees have made supported employment financially viable for providers.

### Financial Comparison of Supported Employment vs. Day Training

Materials were created to compare the financial outcomes of supported employment versus day training.

Findings showed that supporting one individual in supported employment generates the same net income as serving seven individuals in day training, making supported employment a lucrative opportunity for providers.

### Job Availability & Employment Climate in Kentucky

Data from the workforce innovation board shows 739,000 job openings in Kentucky by 2031.

Of these, 39,000 openings are accessible to individuals without formal educational credentials, highlighting the positive employment climate.

### Transportation & Wages Impact

Transportation barriers remain a persistent challenge, with efforts to address them through future transportation planning initiatives.

The impact of wages on benefits was also noted as an important consideration.

### OVR's Efforts & Upcoming Initiative

Jeff White praised efforts in making DB 101 accessible, which helps families and individuals understand employment possibilities.

An upcoming email to waiver providers will outline the supported employment initiative and available resources, aiming to expand the number of participating providers. A clearer picture of participation is expected by next month.

### Regulatory Changes & IPS Standards

Regulatory changes for waivers are on track.

Lori Norton is assisting in maintaining IPS standards for these initiatives.

## *Public Policy*

Committee Chair, Diana Merzweiler provided the Public Policy Committee report.

### CIE Definition Update

Diana provided an update on the committee's work, highlighting optimism about legislative progress on updating the CIE (Competitive Integrated Employment) definition. The committee expects news within the next 30-60 days, though a weather-

related delay may occur. This effort has been ongoing for 14-15 months. The legislative recommendation currently sits with the Education and Labor Cabinet.

#### Collaboration with Kentucky Department of Education

The committee plans to work with the Kentucky Department of Education on their IEP (Individualized Education Program) guidance document. There's potential to form an ad hoc committee of IEP process experts to provide suggestions aimed at increasing employment opportunities during education.

#### Document on Waiver Employment Disqualification

Justin Jeter, Jeff White, and Amy Luttrell are developing a document for the Executive Committee's review. The document aims to address the issue of employed individuals holding waivers who are being disqualified due eligibility and SGA requirements.

#### Outreach to Legislative Channels

Amy Luttrell provided an update on outreach efforts to legislative channels, in collaboration with Adam Haley, Justin Jeter, and Jeff White. The focus is on addressing the high number of Kentuckians with disabilities receiving benefits and the low labor force participation rate in this group. The goal is to highlight work disincentives within public benefits programs and advocate for policies that encourage employment. Adam Haley and Michael Dalto are working together to understand these issues better and inform legislators.

### *Transition*

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley noted that Frank Huffman and Jessica Beaven have stepped down. Additionally, Katie highlighted the transition committee's work in the last meeting packets, emphasizing the idea of creating resources about transition and how different parties, teachers, and families can approach, and the transition 360 curriculums referred to the previous presentation by Jason Wheatley. Katie reiterated that if anyone is interested in becoming the Transition Committee Chair, those interested members can reach out to discuss workload prior to a vote in April for a new committee chair.

## **Department of Labor Notice on 14(c) Certificates**

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Council Member, Johnny Callebs provided an update on the work encompassing different systems and then informs the group about the Department of Labor notice proposing to end the issuance of 14(c) certificates, which allow employers to pay subminimum wages. The public comment period ends on January 17, 2025. He encouraged committee members in the comment period to support the rule's progression. The proposed rule would halt new 14(c) certificates and phase out existing

ones, allowing existing certificate holders to apply for renewals up to three years. He explained that there will be an endpoint to 14(c) certificates and encouraged participants to submit comments. The National Association supports the rule, and the provided link contains relevant information. He suggested including firsthand stories from individuals who have transitioned from 14(c) environments to successful employment.

## Public Comment

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No comment was addressed.

## Adjournment

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Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Member, Lori Norton made the motion to adjourn. Member, Annett Jett 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

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April 11, 2025  
1:00pm – 3:00pm



## Kentucky Employment First Quarterly Council Meeting

Minutes

April 11, 2025

1:00pm – 3:00pm

Zoom/Virtual Format

**Attendees:** Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Diana Merzweiler, Legislative Liaison, Bill Bates, Amanda Friend, Johnny Callebs, Tal Curry, Gretta Hylton, Cora McNabb, Lori Norton, Amanda Friend, Jeff White, Annette Jett, Amy Luttrell, Todd Coffey, Rebecca Wilson, David Allgood, Carmen Hancock/Leslie Hoffman proxy, and Merry Reid Sheffer

**Staff Attendees:** Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, Deana Wilson-Kimbler, Ron O’Hair, Betty Whittaker, Susie Edwards, Kristen Beach, Jonathan White, and Holly Hendricks

**Members Absent:** Jessica Beaven, Dawn Gardner, Frank Huffman, Jeff Edwards, Andrew Johnson, Robert Larry Taylor and, Morgan Turner, Vice-Chair

**Interpreters:** Abby Mattingly and Kayla Griggs

**Roll/Call:** Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) staff support, Anu Kumari, provided the roll call. A quorum was determined.

Due to inclement weather, the full council quarterly meeting was scheduled as virtual only with no in-person option at that time.

**Welcome:** KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard welcomed everyone to the meeting and agenda was viewed by all participants.

### Staff Report

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard provided the staff report.

## Outreach Materials

Nanci reminded Council members of outreach materials and other resources available to the Employment First Council members which include a floor banner, tabletop banner, tablecloth, and printed informational brochures. These resources can be utilized at conferences, job fairs, and public presentations.

## Council Vacancies

Nanci reported there are upcoming vacancies on the Employment First Council, with 26 members' term expiring on October 3, 2025. She stated that applications from individuals seeking initial appointment or reappointment are currently being collected. The compiled list of applicants will be submitted to the Governor's Office of Boards and Commissions within the next several weeks.

## Dropbox Update

Nanci announced that the Employment First Council's Dropbox is currently undergoing reorganization and revision. A new access link will be disseminated to members upon completion.

## Project NEON

Nanci shared that Staff Assistant; Betty Whittaker will lead initiatives related to customized employment and benefits planning under the Project NEON framework. Council members were encouraged to contact Betty directly for additional information.

## Approval of Minutes

Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, called for a motion to accept the January 10, 2025, minutes as written. **Council member, Amanda Owen made the motion to accept the January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025, Council minutes as written. Johnny Callebs, second. No opposition or abstentions. Motion carried.**

## Chair Report

Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley provided the Chair report.

## KY Chamber of Commerce, Disability Hiring Academy

Employment First was highlighted during a three-day event hosted by the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce's Disability Hiring Academy. A representative from the Kentucky Chamber is scheduled to speak at the July 11<sup>th</sup> Employment First Council meeting.

## Northeast Kentucky Workforce Development Conference:

It shared by Katie that Employment First was represented at the Kentucky Northeast Workforce Development Center. She and Vice-Chair, Morgan Turner participated in a session that highlighted employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

## Transition Resource Document

The Chair provided an update on the newly developed Transition Resource Sheet. Council member, Tal Curry, has & in the development of the resource sheet and it will be distributed once complete.

## Order of Selection (OOS)

Katie reported on the current developments within KYOVR regarding OOS. Katie encouraged council members and guests to participate in the upcoming public hearings and submit comments during the designated public comment period. A link was shared that contained detailed information for further inquiries regarding upcoming OOS public hearings. The hearings are scheduled for Monday, the April 14, 2025 via Zoom at 10:00am and 6:00pm (EST).

## Letter of Support

The Chair reported the Employment First Council Executive Committee had approved a letter of support on March 6, 2025 on behalf of the full council. This letter of support contained information on how KYOVR can improve self-employment processes and allow individuals with disabilities to pursue entrepreneurship should they choose to do so. A copy of the letter was included in the meeting materials. This action was taken due to impending submission deadlines.

## Election for Transition Committee Chair

Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley announced a vacancy for the position of Transition Committee Chair. She called for nominations from the floor. Council member, Jeff White nominated Tal Curry for the position. Tal Curry accepted the nomination. Katie called for other nominations from the floor. No other nominations were heard.

Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley called for motion to appoint Tal Curry as the Chair of the Transition Committee. **A motion was made by Amanda Owen to accept the nomination of Tal Curry for the position of Transition Committee Chair. David Allgood, second. No opposition or abstentions. Motion carried.**

## Employment First: The Disability Perspective

Council Member, Amanda Friend presented on Employment First from a disability perspective. She stressed the importance of family support in fostering independence for individuals with disabilities. She emphasized the need for self-determination, a strong support system, and the role of adults and professionals in addressing disabilities. The presentation was well received.

## Committee Reports

### Advocacy and Education Committee

Committee Chair, Amanda Owen provided the report. The committee had no new action items to present at this time. A key accomplishment was highlighted: the development of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Google Doc that provided targeted answers and resources for specific audiences.

Initial feedback has been positive. Committee members and stakeholders are encouraged to provide ongoing input and feedback via the document's comment feature.

## Next Steps

- A final review of the FAQ document is scheduled prior to the next council meeting.
- Goal: Obtain final approval and begin promoting effective community use of the document.
- Ms. Owen requested feedback from council members on best practices for outreach and advocacy using the document.
- While no immediate action is required currently, continued engagement and refinement are encouraged.

## Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, provided the report. An update on the Employment First and KYRETAIN Partnership regarding the Employer Seminar Series was provided. Merry Reid announced details of an upcoming presentation

### *“Employer Strategies for Recruitment and Retention”*

April 16, 2025

12:00 - 12:45pm (EST)

Presented by: Sarah Dixon, Unified Sign and Designs

Sarah Dixon will provide insight on employer strategies to recruit a more inclusive workforce, ways to retain employees, and promote success stories.

Merry Reid Sheffer shared the committee is brainstorming potential of supporting employer engagement projects and seeking opportunities for collaboration with other agencies. The committee discussed supporting the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce's Disability Hiring Academy by offering advisory committee members and expressed openness for new project ideas from the council.

## Provider Capacity Committee

Jeff White, Chair of the Provider Capacity Committee, provided an update regarding the committee's recent initiatives. He reported that the committee had focused its efforts on four primary areas, with a central focus on communicating the potential impact of rate changes through KYOVR to support increased provider capacity.

The results of these efforts are:

- More than 20 new provider applications were submitted to OVR.
- Three new waiver providers have been approved.
- An additional four waiver providers are currently in the process of being enrolled.

Jeff noted that the enrollment process for waiver providers remains significantly more time-intensive compared to that of OVR providers.

## Addressing Funding Challenges for Supported Employment Services

- Jeff reported ongoing challenges in providing supported employment services to individuals without access to alternative funding streams.

- The committee explored the potential use of alternative funding streams including ABLE accounts and, in limited cases based on individual benefits, the use of supported employment expenses as work incentives.
- He acknowledged the complexity of the order of selection process and stressed the need to effectively communicate access to service strategies.
- Emphasis was placed on the need for innovative, flexible approaches to ensure service delivery regardless of funding constraints.

### Successes and Expansion of the Support Employment Training Project

- Jeff highlighted the successful expansion of the Supported Employment Training Project, including an increase in staffing capacity.
- The project remains focused on helping individuals both obtain and maintain employment that is appropriate and personally fulfilling.
- Feedback from providers and participants has been positive, reflecting appreciation for the enhanced support services.

### Improving Employment Service Funding Coordination

- Ongoing efforts aim to streamline employment service funding across multiple sources, including KYOVR, the Department of Education, Medicaid Waivers, and state general funds.
- Measures are being implemented to reduce administrative burdens on providers and support the integration of wraparound services.
- Enhanced coordination is fostering the development of individualized employment plans.
- Improved communication among providers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and case managers are contributing to a better likelihood of
- positive employment outcomes.

### Engagement and Referrals

- Jeff encouraged council members to provide input and engage in ongoing discussions.
- Members were also asked to refer interested providers to participate in the initiative.

## Public Policy Committee

Committee Chair, Diana Merzweiler, provided the report. She stated during the committee meeting there was a Project NEON update from Staff Assistant, Betty Whittaker. Some highlights of the report include:

### Project NEON Update

- To build capacity to provide Customized Employment in Kentucky
  - Create a customized employment process, review the current CIE process used by vocational rehabilitation, create a fidelity tool, review current CIE training provided by Human Development Institute, create a rate system to support customized employment services, training and outcomes.
- Create the capacity to increase SSDI and SSI benefits support for OVR.
  - To customize basic training on SSDI and SSI work incentives for KYOVR.
  - Research and advise OVR and other Kentucky partners on how to improve Kentucky's Medicaid Buy- In program

- Collaborate with work with national experts: Annette Shea on Buy-In programs. Hours provided by Robbie Barbieri –Tennessee-based non-profit advocate.
- Customize and deliver “*Why on earth should I work my way off SSDI?*” Customize and deliver training on Kentucky state specific benefits for benefits planners.

Ron O'Hair, KYOVR Supported Employment/CRP Branch Manager will work with Karen Lee and Tricia Jones Parkin. Donna Osburn, KYOVR Administrator, will handle the SSI and SSDI work with Michael Dalto.

## CIE Definition Update

Diana stated there is currently no new development.

## Kentucky Department of Education Educators Training Modules/IEP Document Review

### *Transition Document*

- Workgroup is updating the website to use clearer language for educators and align terminology between adult services and education.

### *IEP Document Review*

- A workgroup has been formed who include, Sara Tinker, Johnny Collett, and Tal Curry to identify improvements for the IEP guidance document and association Transition documents.

## Benefit Cliff/ Medicaid updates

Amy Luttrell reported no new updates on benefit cliffs.

## Legislative Watch

- Senate Bills 178 and 202
- OVR restructuring legislation
- Senate Bill 103 on OVR payments for CRPs
- Changes to House Bills 9 and HB 695 on Managed Care Organizations (MCOs).

## Transition Committee

Katie Wolf Whaley, Interim Chair of the Transition Committee provided the report. The report included the following highlights:

- She announced the committee reviewed the *Frequently Asked Questions* (FAQ) document developed by the Advocacy and Education Committee. No additional comments were recorded at that time.
- She continued, a brief discussion was held during the committee meetings regarding the IEP document review process and the development of content for the Transition 360 training course.
- The subcommittee also discussed the ‘Transition Resource Sheet’ for all students with disabilities ages 13 to 21. This resource was developed by a workgroup that included representatives from the State Advisory Panel for Exceptional Children, the Employment First Council, and the Kentucky Advisory Council on Autism.

## Public Comment

No comment was addressed.

## Adjournment

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Council member, Tal Curry made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Cora McNabb, second. Motion passed and the meeting was adjourned.**

Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

## Next Meeting

Date: July 11, 2025.

Time: 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm.

**Nanci Howard**

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## Kentucky Employment First Quarterly Council Meeting

Minutes

July 11, 2025

1:00pm – 3:00pm (EST)

Zoom/Virtual Format

### Attendees:

Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Morgan Turner, Vice-Chair, Amanda Owen, Bill Bates, Johnny Callebs, Tal Curry, Jason Wheatley/Gretta Hylton Proxy, Cora McNabb, Lori Norton, Jeff White, Todd Coffey, Rebecca Wilson, Leslie Hoffman, Andrew Johnson, Robert Larry Taylor, David Allgood, Johnny Callebs, and Merry Reid Sheffer.

### Staff Attendees:

Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, Ron O’Hair, Betty Whittaker, Susie Edwards, and Holly Hendricks.

### Guest:

Ryan Bowman, Carmen Hancock, Amanda Hutchison, Melanie Lybarger, Zac Sappenfield, Shelly Durbin, Joann Wells, Lisa Carrico, Susan Brown, Melissa Marvel, and Johnny Collett.

### Members Absent:

Jessica Beaven, Dawn Gardner, Frank Huffman, Jeff Edwards, Amanda Friend, Annette Jett, and Amy Luttrell.

**Roll Call:** Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) staff support, Anu Kumari, provided the roll call. A quorum was determined.

**Welcome:** KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard welcomed everyone to the meeting and agenda was viewed by all participants.

# Staff Report

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard provided the staff report and began by providing members with an update on council recommendations for appointment. She reported that all supporting materials were formally submitted through the appropriate channels on May 29, 2025. Twenty-six council members' terms will expire on October 3, 2025. She stated the hope is to receive the confirmation of appointments prior to the October 3rd date. She reiterated that current members are allowed to continue serving on the council until their successors have been officially appointed. She also extended her sincere appreciation to those who submitted applications, as well as to all current members for their continued service and steadfast commitment to the Council's mission.

Employment First Council five standing committees were highlighted. It was mentioned that these committee meetings are open to the public and include the following:

- Advocacy and Education
- Employer Education and Engagement
- Provider Capacity
- Public Policy
- Transition

Guests interested in participating in committee work were encouraged to contact the respective committee chair or the Council Chair. The Council welcomes engagement from individuals with diverse expertise.

Nanci concluded her report by providing a formal demonstration of the Employment First Council's updated Dropbox platform. She began by reminding Council members that a shared Dropbox had previously been utilized for the storage and retrieval of essential Council documents. She further noted that the platform has since been revised to include current and pertinent materials that support the Council's ongoing initiatives.

The primary objective of the Dropbox is to facilitate consistent and convenient access to all meeting-related documentation for Council members. She confirmed that access has been granted to all members. Any individuals experiencing technical difficulties or who have not yet received access are advised to contact staff support, Ms. Anu Kumari, for assistance.

The demonstration included an overview of the newly organized folder structure, which comprises the following categories:

- Quarterly Council Meetings
- Special Call Meetings
- Committee Meetings
- New Member Information
- Infographics
- Policy Recommendations
- Annual Reports
- Forms and Templates
- Resources

## Approval of Minutes

Employment First Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, called the meeting to order.

The Chair called for a motion to accept the April 11, 2025, minutes as written. **Council member, Cora McNabb made the motion to accept the April 11th, 2025, council minutes as written. Jeff White, second. No opposition or abstentions. Motion carried.**

## Chair Report

Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley provided the Chair report.

### American Disabilities Act 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration:

The Office of vocational Rehabilitation and Human Development Institute two council agencies represented on the council are partnering a virtual American Disabilities Act (ADA) 35th Anniversary Celebration. This celebration, scheduled for July 29th, will be a virtual, panel featuring individuals who have experienced the impact of the ADA. The importance of this event for gathering information and understanding the lived experiences of Kentuckians with disabilities, suggesting it as a valuable resource for the council's work.

### Order of Selection (OOS):

As of May 14th, Kentucky OVR is in an Order of Selection. We have discussed this coming, in previous meetings, and you can find additional information on OVR's website. Several agencies represented here have been working to get accurate information out, to encourage people to apply and join the wait list, and to find alternative ways to access employment supports. Employment First remains the priority, at this point we need to help people gain employment event when OVR is not the primary service provider.

### Additional updates include:

- Employment First as a topic was invited to present at the Autism Educators Institute hosted by the Kentucky Autism Training Center.
- Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) continues to expand its Transition 360 course offerings, with an emphasis on employment as a key part of transition planning.

Continued collaboration with the Project NEON Initiative continues, One NEON efforts is providing training to VR counselors on how wages impact benefit employment for individuals with disabilities, addressing common misunderstandings and fears that hinder employment. Another NEON effort focuses on finding new and more effective ways to train providers in customized employment, aiming to reduce barriers for individuals with significant disabilities and promote their successful integration into the workforce.

The Chair concluded the report by thanking council members, staff, and guests for their continued dedication, and recognized those actively supporting committee work and the ‘*Employment First Mission.*’

## Election for Public Policy Committee Chair/ Legislative Liaison Discussion

Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley informed the Council of the resignation of Diana Merzweiler, who served as Legislative Liaison and Chair of the Public Policy Committee. As a result, there are now vacancies for both the Public Policy Committee Chair and the Legislative Liaison positions. Chair Katie Wolf Whaley opened the floor for discussion and presented the option to hold a vote during the current meeting or defer the matter to a future meeting.

Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley called for motion to table the discussion and election of both positions to the October meeting, allowing for further conversation and interest gathering. **A motion was made by Rebecca Wilson to table the discussion and election of both positions to the October meeting. Johnny Callebs, second. No opposition or abstentions. Motion carried.**

Chair Katie Wolf Whaley encouraged any interested Council members to reach out to either herself or KYOVR Administrator Nanci Howard for further discussion about the responsibilities.

## Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Presentation

Ryan Bowman, Workforce Development Manager at the [Kentucky Chamber of Commerce](#), provided an overview of the Chamber’s strategic workforce initiatives aimed at increasing employment access for underrepresented populations across the Commonwealth.

The presentation highlighted several key programs administered through the Kentucky Chamber Workforce Center, which operates under the Kentucky Chamber Foundation.

- [Fair Chance Academy](#) – Supports employers in hiring individuals from justice-involved and recovery communities, offering training, resources, and a cohort-based learning model.
- [Disability Hiring Academy](#) – Encourages inclusive hiring practices and provides customizable tools for employers to integrate disability inclusion into existing workflows.
- [Military Hiring Academy](#) – Helps businesses better understand and translate military skills into civilian roles, fostering veteran recruitment across Kentucky.
- [New American Hiring Workshop](#) – Focuses on immigrant workforce inclusion, with targeted training for businesses in areas with growing immigrant populations.

Mr. Bowman concluded by acknowledging the ongoing collaboration between the Kentucky Chamber and Employment First Council members. Council members expressed appreciation for the presentation and interest in continued partnership and future engagement.

# Committee Reports

## Advocacy and Education Committee

Committee Chair, Amanda Owen provided the report. She provided an update on the development of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document. The primary objective of this initiative was to develop consistent, response for various stakeholder groups, include section were highlighted:

- Employers
- Educational Professionals
- Job Seekers with Disabilities
- Disabilities Service Providers
- Caregivers/Guardians of Job Seekers with Disabilities

The initial draft of the FAQ document was reviewed by all Employment First Council Committees. The draft was also distributed via email, available in the drop box, and the link was shared in the chat.

The committee proposed that the council review and approve the content of the FAQ document. Once approved, the document will proceed to the next phase, which includes accessibility review, branding, and universal design compliance.

On the behalf of Advocacy and Education Committee, Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley called for motion to approve the FAQ document as submitted to move forward for accessibility, branding and cabinet approval. **A motion was made by Jeff White to accept the FAQ document as submitted to move forward for accessibility, branding and cabinet approval. Andrew Johnson and Merry Reid Sheffer second. No opposition or abstentions. Motion carried.**

The next steps include accessibility review, branding, and submission for cabinet approval. Further updates will be shared as progress continues.

## Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, provided the report. The committee has been exploring collaboration with Bev Harp and *the Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers* (ISAW) training program. The plan involves adapting ISAW's comprehensive training into smaller, modular sessions to facilitate easier delivery. The committee aims to partner with state and local chambers of commerce to offer these trainings.

The proposed training sessions would be delivered quarterly or bi-monthly and focus on specific topics via short videos derived from the ISAW curriculum. These sessions would also incorporate facilitated discussions and Q&A opportunities involving community and business leaders. The existing RETAIN Kentucky webinar listserv will be utilized to invite participants and maintain engagement.

The committee's next steps include inviting representatives from the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders to collaborate on developing a detailed plan and timeline for implementation.

## Provider Capacity Committee

Jeff White, Chair of the Provider Capacity Committee, provided an update on committee ongoing efforts. There were no action items at this time. The committee has initiated efforts to educate service providers on alternative funding mechanisms for supported and customized employment services. A preliminary review has yielded approximately eleven categories of potential funding opportunities that could be leveraged. The committee plans to develop a webinar or potentially a series of webinars to highlight these funding opportunities. The intent is to feature examples from providers currently utilizing these resources. The committee will be reaching out to these providers to request their collaboration in developing content and best practices for broader dissemination. Upcoming committee meetings are scheduled for September and November. Mr. White encouraged participation from stakeholders to contribute to the development of materials that will strengthen the provider network statewide.

## Public Policy Committee

Interim Chair Katie Wolf Whaley provided an update on the committee's ongoing efforts. There were no action items at that time. The committee's recent discussions primarily focused on changes in service delivery related to the current Order of Selection and the importance of communicating accurate, up-to-date information to stakeholders. The committee emphasized the need for both individuals and providers to understand the actual status of services, as opposed to misinformation that may be circulating.

Additionally, the committee received internal updates, including work being done on the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) guidance document.

The committee also continues to monitor developments related Project NEON ensuring that the committee is informed and prepared to offer support or recommendations as needed.

## Transition Committee

Tal Curry Chair of the Transition Committee provided the report. The committee focused on the transition resource sheet for students with disabilities aged 13 to 21. The resource sheet has been distributed and is being utilized; however, the original version was not fully accessible.

To address this, a QR code and a link to the Kentucky Advising Council's WordPress-based website which is screen reader compatible have been included at the top of the document to ensure accessibility. A small workgroup is expected to reconvene in August to begin planning for the next version of the transition resource.

There was no Transition 360 update at this time. No action items or review requests were presented. The committee has invited a representative from Waiver programs to participate in the next committee meeting to support ongoing discussions regarding Medicaid waivers.

## Public Comment

No comment was addressed.

## Adjournment

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Council member, Tal Curry made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Amanda Owen, second. Motion passed and the meeting was adjourned.** Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

## Next Meeting

Date: October 10, 2025.

Time: 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm (EST)

### **Nanci Howard**

Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator

Education and Labor Cabinet, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

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Created by:

### **Anu Kumari**

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**Andy Beshear**

Governor

**Jamie Link**

Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

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# Kentucky Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting

Minutes

October 10, 2025

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm (EST)

Zoom

## Members Present

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Interim Chair, Jeff White, Katie Wolf Whaley/Proxy Carolyn Wheeler, Amanda Owen, Amy Luttrell, Bill Bates, Johnny Callebs, Tal Curry, Cora McNabb/Proxy Susie Edwards, Rebecca Wilson, Leslie Hoffman, Andrew Johnson, Merry Reid Sheffer, Robert Larry Taylor, David Allgood, Johnny Callebs, Jeff Edwards, and Staci Cain/Proxy Joann Wells.

## Guest Present

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Ann Hollen, Kate Dean, Bailee Jones, Marym Martin, Brettam Hensley, Lindsey Pridmore, Vanessa Rose Garangnani, Jennifer Hart, Samantha Jacobs, Sydne Taylor, Mcline, Melaine Lybargar, Amanda Hutchison, Andi Atha, Courtney Blocker, David Potter, Haley Gossett, Carrie Wedding, Amber Coleman, Jourdan Collins, Melaine Tyner Wilson, Shelly Durbin, Metzinger Taylor, and Zac Sappenfield

## KYOVR Staff Present

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Nanci Howard, Holly Hendricks, Anu Kumari, Kristen Beach, Jonathan White, and Ron O'Hair

## Members Absent

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Gretta Hylton, Lori Norton, and Frank Huffman

## Welcome | Agenda Review

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Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Nanci Howard, welcomed attendees. The agenda was reviewed and acknowledged by all participants.

## Roll Call

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Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrative Specialist Senior, Anu Kumari, provided the roll call. A quorum was determined.

## Staff Report

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KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, provided the staff report.

### A. Council Appointment Updates

- Appointment recommendations were submitted through the appropriate channels and remain under review at Boards and Commissions. Appointments have not been received as of 10.10.2025.

#### Council Member Terms and Voting:

- Twenty-six (26) terms expired on October 3, 2025. Members shall serve a three-year term and, pursuant to statute/bylaws, continue to serve until their successors are appointed; duly appointed members retain voting rights and count toward quorum until replaced or they resign.
- Those who are unable to attend meetings, are encouraged to consider sending a proxy. As per council bylaws, proxy members may vote.

#### Recognition of Departing Members:

Departing members were recognized and certificates of appreciation will be mailed to individuals who no longer serve on the council.

- Jessica Beaven
- Todd Coffey
- Amanda Friend
- Dawn Gardner
- Annette Jett
- Diana Merzweiler
- Morgan Turner

## B. Committee Participation & Upcoming Meeting Schedule

The Employment First Council maintains five standing committees. Meetings are open to the public:

- 1) Advocacy & Education Committee:
  - November 7, 9:00–10:00 a.m. (EST)
- 2) Employer Education & Engagement Committee:
  - November 12, 1:00–2:00 p.m. (EST)
  - December 10, 1:00–2:00 p.m. (EST)
- 3) Provider Capacity Committee:
  - October 21, 2025, 2:00–3:00 p.m. (EST)
- 4) Public Policy Committee:
  - October 16, 2025, 9:00–10:00 a.m. (EST)
- 5) Transition Committee:
  - November 20, 2025, 9:30–10:30 a.m. (EST)

Individuals interested in joining a committee should contact the respective committee chair or the Council Chair. The Council welcomes diverse expertise, and all meetings are open to the public

## C. Employment First Council Contact & Website Update

- A new email inbox has been established: [employmentfirst@ky.gov](mailto:employmentfirst@ky.gov), monitored daily; routed to appropriate staff/committees.
- The Employment First [webpage](#) is updated regularly (monthly or as needed). Both links were provided in the meeting chat. Members and the public are encouraged to report any errors or needed updates to staff promptly.

## D. Annual Report — Review & Update

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, presented a draft of the annual report and highlighted its key elements.

- The Executive Committee met on August 8<sup>th</sup> and September 12<sup>th</sup> to assist with compiling the report.
- A draft of the annual report was distributed to Council members via email prior to the meeting for their review and feedback.
- A brief update was presented by KYOVR Administrator; feedback was received.

**On behalf of the Executive Committee, Council Interim Chair Jeff White moved for the approval of the format and foundational content of the Employment First Council draft annual report, pending the collection of additional data and final approval of the complete document. As the motion originated from the Executive Committee, no second was required. No opposition or abstentions. No further discussion. Motion carried.**

## **Approval of Minutes**

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Interim Chair Jeff White called the meeting to order and called for a motion to accept the July 11, 2025, minutes as written.

**Council Member Amanda Owen made the motion to accept the July 11, 2025, council minutes as written. Andrew Johnson, second. No opposition or abstentions. Motion carried.**

## **KYOVR Order of Selection (OOS) Update**

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On behalf of the Executive Director of the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Cora McNabb, the Deputy Executive Director, Susie Edwards, provided an update on OVR's Order of Selection

### **Current Status**

- There are no changes to OOS at this time; all categories remain closed.
  - OVR is working with fiscal staff on the federal year-end closeout.

### **Waitlist Overview**

- At this time, the waitlist includes 3,542 individuals.
  - This total includes approximately 800 individuals who transitioned to the waitlist when OOS was implemented and were in application status without an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).
- Approximately 97% of individuals on the waitlist fall within category one and two.

### **Regulatory Updates**

- OVR staff are updating the OVR's administrative regulations and the Policy and Procedure Manual.
- Preliminary policy updates have been submitted to legal for review and integration of recommended edits.
- The plan is to file the regulation as an emergency regulation to allow immediate effect upon filing.

She concluded her report by opening the floor for questions; none were raised.

## **Interagency MOU- Adult Supported Employment**

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A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the following Cabinet and agency partners was discussed.

- Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
- Kentucky Department for Medicaid Services (DMS)
- Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities — Division of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID/DDID)
- Division of Adult Guardianship, Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS)

The goal of the MOU focuses on the provision of Adult Supported Employment services. The existing MOU between the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities— Division of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, was originally executed in July 2012.

The new MOU will be process-focused, formalizing current interagency collaboration and clarifying the primary barriers affecting waiver participants' opportunities to enter the workforce.

**On behalf of the Executive Committee, Jeff White moved that the Kentucky Employment First Council endorse in principle the negotiation of a formal Memorandum of Understanding between the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Kentucky Department of Medicaid Services, the Kentucky Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental, and Intellectual Disabilities – Division of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, and the Division of Adult Guardianship within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to establish a formal collaborative framework to enhance competitive integrated employment outcomes through the coordinated delivery of adult Supported Employment services. As this motion originates from a standing committee, no second is required. No opposition or abstentions. No further discussion. Motion carried.**

## **1915 (i) RISE Imitative Presentation**

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Ann Holland, Executive Advisor and Program Director at DBHDID, provided a concise overview of Kentucky's 1915(i) Initiative, RISE (Recovery, Independence, Support,

Engagement), serving adults with serious mental illness. She noted that 1915(i) is not a waiver, has no slots or waitlist, and bases eligibility on functional need rather than institutional level of care. Services include universal case management, tenancy supports, in-home independent living supports, supervised residential care (up to three individuals per home), assistive technology, medication management, non-medical transportation, planned respite, and IPS-supported education and employment. She shared 1915 (i) RISE Initiative Fee Schedule and [Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities](#) webpage with the council members.

## **“Never Too Early” Presentation**

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Kate Dean, Director of Community-Based Partnerships and Strategy with Child Care Aware at the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute, provided a presentation entitled the “Never Too Early” initiative. She provided an overview of efforts to introduce career awareness and foundational work-readiness skills in early childhood (ages 3–5) through intentional inclusion and play-based learning in childcare settings. She noted that year one delivered four trainings reaching approximately 100 parents and providers; based on feedback that families of very young children with disabilities face competing demands, year two shifted to provider-focused training and technical assistance, supported by HDI’s [Checklist](#) for a “Bright Future” resources spanning ages 3–5 through young adulthood. The 2025 schedule includes four live virtual sessions marketed to more than 2,000 childcare programs statewide, with 220+ registrants to date and strong initial satisfaction; the team aims to deliver hands-on classroom technical assistance in at least three to five sites.

## **Committee Reports**

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### *Advocacy and Education Committee*

Committee Chair, Amanda Owen, provided an overview of the Committee’s work. The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) resource is completed and currently under review; the Committee is awaiting feedback prior to release. Recent discussion focused on a distribution strategy to ensure active use beyond website posting, including targeted outreach to teachers and employers, integration of a QR code linking to the FAQ within the Council’s standard Supported Employment flyer, and deployment of the flyer/QR at conferences, exhibit tables, and partner events. The objective is to maximize accessibility and adoption of the resource across stakeholder groups once finalized.

## *Employer Education and Engagement Committee*

Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, reported that following the conclusion of the RETAIN Kentucky Project, the Committee partnered with the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute on the Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW) initiative led by Bev Hart. ISAW's existing three-hour employer training is being repackaged into two-minute topical videos distributed monthly, with a quarterly virtual gathering for recipients to address questions regarding the content. Distribution will leverage the Kentucky Chamber, regional chambers, and the Coalition for Workforce Diversity, utilizing the RETAIN attendee list and HDI's and CRP list to expand reach. The first video is scheduled for October 22 at 12:00 p.m. (EST), followed by releases in November and December, with the first virtual gathering in January.

## *Provider Capacity Committee*

Committee Chair, Jeff White, provided an overview of the Provider Capacity Committee's ongoing activities. He announced the exploration of the Expansion of Potential Employment Service Funding Sources. Two Webinars were originally planned for October and/or November. This project will be forthcoming due to scheduling issues. The webinars will include the following topics:

- Becoming an Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Vendor
- Obtain Certification as a 1915 (C) Waiver Provider
- Seeking Funding through State General Funds
- Become an I-RISE Provider
- Become an employment network (Ticket to Work)
- Develop a relationship with local school districts
- Applying for funding through Special AD Valorem (Mental Health/ intellectual disabilities) Tax Districts.
- Seek funding through grants and philanthropy- United Way/Private Foundation/Corporate Sponsorship
- Develop a fee schedule for private pay service
- Utilizing Able Account to fund employment Services
- Building stronger Employer Relationships / Assisting in taking advantage of tax incentives
- Initiate your own fund development opportunities
- Increasing numbers of waiver participants are continuing to access supported employment services utilizing Medicaid funding. We are beginning to plan the

process that will need to be followed to transition these persons to OVR funding when it becomes available.

### *Public Policy Committee*

Jeff White provided an overview of the Public Policy committee's work.

- The committee delayed electing a new chairperson and Legislative Liaison until the slate of officers is voted upon in early 2026.
- The committee also suggested a revision to the Employment First Council bylaws to clarify the role of the legislative liaison and is working on the language.

### *Transition Committee*

Transition Committee Chair, Tal Curry, provided an overview of the Transition Committee's work.

- The Committee discussed ongoing Transition 360 education efforts and plans to collaborate with Jason Wheatley and KDE to ensure Council input is reflected in statewide transition resources.
- The IEP review updates working group will reconvene with additional education professionals to advance recommendations.
- Transition Resource Sheet developed in coordination with the Kentucky Advisory Council on Autism, the Council's Transition Committee, and the State Advisory Council for Exceptional Children; the document is prepared for submission to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services for approval, with status updates to be provided at the next meeting.

## **Announcement(s)**

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Employment First Council Interim Chair Jeff White shared that the Kentucky APSE Conference is scheduled for December 8–9, 2025, in Elizabethtown, KY. For more information, a [link](#) was shared.

## **Public Comments**

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None.

## Adjournment

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Employment First Interim Chair Jeff White called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Council member Tal Curry made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Andrew Johnson was second. Motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.** Interim Chair Jeff White thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

## Next Meeting Date

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January 9, 2026

1:00 pm- 3:00 pm (EST)

Location and Zoom meeting information will be forthcoming.