



Andy Beshear  
Governor

Jamie Link  
Education & Labor Cabinet Secretary

## Kentucky Employment First Full Council Meeting Minutes

October 11, 2024

1:00pm – 3:00pm

[Zoom Link](#)/In-Person

### Transportation Cabinet

200 Mero Street, Frankfort, KY 40601

Meeting ID: 831 4350 9206

Passcode: 100392

**Members Present:** 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:** 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:** 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.

**Guests Present:** 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.

**Interpreters:** Tia Henson and Christina Vice.

### **Roll/Call**

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

### **Welcome/Announcement/Staff Report:**

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 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup>. 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, and to the Governor's office by December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, as per KRS 151B.211-214.

### **Approval of Minutes**

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

### **Chair Report:**

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:**

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:** 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:**

**Advocacy and Education Committee:** 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:** 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:**

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:**

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 dissent. 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:**

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:** 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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:** No public comment addressed.

### **Adjournment:**

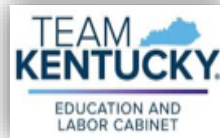
Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Member, Larry Taylor made the motion to adjourn. Member, Johnny Calles provided a second to the motion. Members voted. The motion passed and the**



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

**Next Meeting:**

- Date: January 10, 2025
- Time: 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm



**Administrator: Nanci Howard**

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