



**Kentucky Employment First Council**  
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**Andy Beshear**  
Governor

**Jamie Link**  
Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

# Employment First Council

## Public Policy Committee

Minutes  
February 12, 2026  
9:00 am – 10:00 am (EST)  
Zoom  
Meeting ID: 817 4368 7977

### Members Present

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Committee Chair Andrew Johnson, Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley, Council Vice Chair Jeff White, Cora McNabb, Joann Wells, Karen Maciag, Michelle Thrift, Austin Nugent, and Alisha Clark

### Members Absent

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Susan Brown, Amy Luttrell, Gretta Hylton/Proxy, and Leslie Hoffman

### Staff Present

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Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, Holly Hendricks, and Betty Whittaker

### Welcome | Agenda Review:

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Employment First Committee Chair Andrew Johnson welcomed attendees. All participants reviewed the agenda.

### Project NEON/Application Update

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The committee received an update on the Kentucky Project NEON technical assistance application. The NEON program has expanded available subject matter expert (SME) technical assistance to approximately 500–700 hours per year for three years. The

proposal was developed under an expedited timeline with support from cross-agency partners.

The application focuses on several priority areas, including:

- Addressing the impact of increasing wages on public benefit eligibility and reducing benefits-related employment barriers.
- Strengthening data collection and analysis capacity through participation in national employment leadership efforts.
- Expanding employment outcome tracking across disability populations, including individuals with serious mental illness, substance use disorders, brain injury, and other disability groups.
- Supporting implementation and provider capacity related to long-term employment supports, including I-RISE services.
- Strengthening customized employment training and fidelity across provider systems.
- Improving understanding of available employment services among case managers and rehabilitation counselors to support person-centered service matching.
- The application includes collaboration from multiple state agencies and partner organizations. Notification of award status is expected on February 20.

## **Order of Selection update**

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The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation provided an update on the status of the Order of Selection (OOS). It was reported that 4,864 individuals are currently on the waitlist.

The agency continues to assess budget projections. Federal funding award notifications are anticipated in the coming weeks, which may help clarify available resources. No timeline is currently available for when individuals on the waitlist may be served. The status is being monitored on an ongoing (near-daily) basis.

## **IEP Guidance Document Update**

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The committee received an update on the IEP Guidance Document. It was noted that work on this effort had paused and will resume this year.

Prior work included a small group review on existing IEP guidance used by educators and identify opportunities to incorporate an Employment First perspective to support improved transition-to-employment outcomes for students with disabilities.

Committee members interested in participating in future workgroup discussions were encouraged to express interest. Additional updates will be provided at a future meeting.

## **2026 General Assembly Update | Committee Priorities Discussion**

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Committee members discussed developments amid the 2026 General Assembly, particularly introduced bills within the Council’s subject matter jurisdiction. [House Bill 562](#) was discussed. Discussion included legislation related to workforce development, alternate high school diplomas, and potential implications for employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The committee noted possible confusing language, specifically how the change in language could impact existing programs. The committee concluded it was best to communicate with partners at the Kentucky Department of Education for clarity.

The committee discussed potential areas to monitor over the next three-year cycle, including legislative activity, workforce trends, and system changes impacting individuals with disabilities. Members agreed to continue the discussion at the future meeting.

## **Public Comments**

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None.

## **Adjournment**

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Employment First Committee Chair, Andrew Johnson, thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

## **Next Meeting Date**

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Thursday, March 26, 2026  
9:00 am- 10:00am (EST)