



**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

## Public Policy Committee

Minutes

March 26, 2026

9:00 am – 10:00 am (EST)

Zoom

Meeting ID: 817 4368 7977

### Members' Present

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Committee Chair/Legislative Liaison Andrew Johnson, Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley, Council Vice Chair Jeff White, Gretta Hylton/Proxy Allison Johnson, Joann Wells, Austin Nugent, and Alisha Clark

### Members Absent

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Susan Brown, Amy Luttrell, Cora McNabb, and Leslie Hoffman

### Staff Present

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Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, and Holly Hendricks

### Welcome | Agenda Review:

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Committee Chair, Andrew Johnson, welcomed attendees and the agenda was reviewed by all participants.

### Committee Chair Update

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Andrew Johnson provided an update regarding his membership status, reporting that his position with the Council of State Governments had concluded. As his appointment was tied to that role, he submitted his resignation from the Council of State Governments

effective March 13, 2026. He further shared that he will continue to serve in an interim capacity until a replacement is appointed and direction is provided through the Boards and Commissions process.

## **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) waitlist. There are currently 5,268 individuals on the waitlist, an increase of nearly 400 individuals since the previous report. Of these, around 4,700 individuals are in Priority Category 1.

No definitive timeline was provided for when services to individuals on the waitlist may resume. However, receipt of the federal grant award notification was noted as a positive development. It was further shared that completion of the state budget process will be a key factor in determining next steps. While no guarantee was made, it is anticipated that a decision regarding the potential to begin serving individuals on the waitlist may be made within the coming months.

## **Kentucky General Assembly Update**

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Austin Nugent, Public Policy Coordinator with the Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities, presented an update on legislative activity within the Kentucky General Assembly. She reported that the 2026 Regular Session (January 6 – April 15) is a budget session, with six legislative days remaining prior to the veto recess scheduled for April 2–13.

About 1,300+ bills were filed, including:

- House: 939
- Senate: 354
- Approximately 130+ were identified as shell bills, which allow for language substitution at a later stage

Governor Andy Beshear signed a proclamation recognizing March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, which included a reference to Employment First and the importance of equal employment opportunities.

### **Key budget and policy highlights included:**

- Proposed funding of \$2.3 million per fiscal year for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Proposed reductions to the Kentucky Supported Higher Education Project:
  - \$20,000 in the first year

- \$35,000 in the second year
- Proposed \$20 million per year for state-run psychiatric and Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs)
- 17,000+ individuals on Medicaid waiver waitlists
- Proposal for 450+ additional waiver slots over the next two years
- Comparison to 2024, when approximately 13,000+ individuals were on the waitlist, and 1,925 slots were provided

### **Budget Session Updates included:**

The Kentucky General Assembly will pass the state budget for the next two fiscal years (July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2028)

- House Bill 500 (House budget)
- Senate Committee Substitute 1 (SCS1) to House Bill 500 (Senate budget version)
- House Bill 304 (Governor’s budget proposal)
- Budget differences between the House and Senate are being addressed through a free conference committee

### **Legislation discussed included:**

- House Bill 2 (Medicaid reform)
- House Bill 498 (Adult Workforce Diploma Pilot Program)
- House Bill 562 (Alternative high school diploma)
- House Bill 686 (Kentucky Positive Youth Development Commission)
- House Joint Resolution 24 (Medicaid work requirements)
- House Joint Resolution 80 (KDE list of IEP resource guidance)
- Senate Bill 69 (Autism Trust Fund)

Legislative activity will continue to be monitored due to the potential impact on services, education, and employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

### **Questions and Follow-up Discussion**

Members reviewed age distribution data for the Michelle P. waitlist, including:

- 1,077 individuals under age 5
- 4,484 ages 5–12
- 1,277 ages 13–17
- Approximately 9,663 total individuals

## Kentucky Department of Education Updates

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Committee Member Gretta Hylton/Proxy, Allison Johnson, provided an update from the Kentucky Department of Education.

### Key updates included:

- [Kentucky Council for Exceptional Children \(KYCEC\)](#) annual awards nomination period is open through June 30, including:
  - KYCEC Business Award recognizing employers supporting individuals with disabilities
  - “Yes I Can” awards recognizing youth achievements across multiple areas, including transition and employment
- [Public comment period open through May 22 for proposed revisions to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\) Part B State Performance Plan.](#)
- [IDEA Part B annual application available for public comment through April 20.](#)
- [Supporting Postsecondary Achievement and Resources for Kentucky \(SPARK\)](#) initiative awarded to 20 school districts, including funding support through June 2027, to strengthen transition services.

The SPARK initiative focuses on enhancing family engagement, implementing earlier transition assessments, and strengthening collaboration with vocational rehabilitation at the local level, including coordination with OVR staff Holly Hendricks and Jonathan White.

KDE-related resources, including public comment opportunities and award nominations, will be compiled, reviewed for accuracy, and shared with committee members and the Employment First Council.

### 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, May 7, 2026  
9:00 am- 10:00am (EST)