



Kentucky Employment First Council

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Employment First Council

Public Policy Committee

Minutes

September 10, 2026

9:00 am – 10:00 am (EST)

Zoom

Meeting ID: 817 4368 7977

Members' Present

Committee Chair/Legislative Liaison Andrew Johnson, Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley, Council Vice Chair Jeff White, JoAnn Wells, and Dev Davidson

Members Absent

Amy Luttrell, Susan Brown, Leslie Hoffman, and Susie Edwards

Staff Present

Anu Kumari, and Brooke McDaniel

Welcome

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

Review of July 30 Annual Report Discussion

The committee reviewed the July 30 discussion regarding potential Annual Report recommendations and areas for continued consideration.

Topics included:

- Employment First and Medicaid work requirements.
- Stable and sustainable funding for employment-related Medicaid services across disability populations.
- Kentucky Medicaid Works/Medicaid Buy-In.
- Cross-disability considerations related to employment services and Medicaid funding.
- The Council's role regarding Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).

Members discussed continued confusion between Employment First and Medicaid work requirements. The council may assist with clarifying the purpose of Employment First; however, detailed guidance regarding Medicaid work requirements, exemptions, and implementation should be provided by Medicaid.

Katie Wolf Whaley reported that she and Jeff White had been invited to present at an upcoming House Bill 144 Commission meeting to clarify Employment First and its purpose.

The committee also discussed employment-related Medicaid funding. Members noted that the previously discussed 4% funding reduction had been rescinded and continued to recognize the importance of stable and sustainable funding for employment-related Medicaid services and long-term supports.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

Committee Chair Andrew Johnson asked whether the Pre-ETS matter required additional Council action. It was clarified that the matter had been addressed through OVR and that the Council member who raised the concern had received the requested clarification.

No additional Council action was necessary.

Annual Report Recommendations Discussion

Medicaid Buy-In

The committee discussed the Kentucky Medicaid Works/Medicaid Buy-In initiative and its potential inclusion in the Annual Report.

Jeff White reported that a white paper is nearing completion for presentation to Medicaid as an initial step in discussing potential program changes. The proposal includes possible

independence accounts and is intended to improve opportunities for individuals with disabilities to increase earnings while maintaining necessary Medicaid-funded services and supports.

Additional discussions with Medicaid will be necessary. Immediate implementation is not anticipated due to other Medicaid-related changes underway; however, no opposition to continued discussion of the initiative had been reported.

Medicaid Buy-In was included among the Medicaid-related areas of emphasis for continued monitoring.

Finalize and Approve Proposed Recommendations

The committee determined that it would not advance formal Annual Report recommendations this year. Instead, developing policy issues will be identified as areas of emphasis for continued monitoring, including Medicaid work requirements and Employment First, Medicaid Buy-In, employment-related Medicaid funding and supports, and other evolving Medicaid issues affecting employment services.

Committee Chair Andrew Johnson encouraged members to also consider recommendations recognizing successful policies, collaborations, agreements, or practices that should continue. No additional recommendations were identified.

Additional Discussion

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Update

The committee received an update on the new OVR case management system, Order of Selection, and CRP payments.

Brooke McDaniel reported that staff continue to adjust to the new system, address processing issues, and use workarounds where needed. Individuals continue to move, or be prepared to move, from the waitlist to plan status, service authorizations are continuing, and some CRP payments have been issued.

Committee Chair Andrew Johnson asked whether the payment delays were related to the system transition rather than a policy change. It was confirmed that the issues were associated with system implementation and processing. Members noted that prolonged delays may create financial challenges for providers and affect provider capacity. No formal policy recommendation was identified.

Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation Meeting update

Brooke McDaniel invited Employment First Council members to attend the upcoming Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation meeting. The meeting will be held on Monday, October 12, 2026, with both in-person and virtual participation available.

State Employment Data Update

Katie Wolf Whaley requested brief information for the Annual Report regarding progress toward improved state-level employment data.

Jeff White reported that a proposed data dictionary and Gantt chart outlining the implementation approach are available to share. The data team plans to test the developing system with larger providers serving multiple populations in the fall, with a broader rollout anticipated in the spring.

iRISE and Employment Services Update

The committee discussed iRISE implementation and employment services.

Katie Wolf Whaley asked how many iRISE providers were utilizing or able to utilize supported employment services. Deb Davidson recalled that approximately 14 new IPS providers had signed up outside of the Community Mental Health Centers but noted that the specific number utilizing iRISE employment services still needed to be confirmed.

Members also discussed the Coordination of Funding form, provider participation, and potential barriers to implementation.

Action Items

- Andrew Johnson will coordinate with Jeff White regarding appropriate Medicaid-related wording for inclusion in the Annual Report.
- Jeff White will provide the proposed data dictionary and Gantt chart to Katie Wolf Whaley and Andrew Johnson.
- Deb Davidson will obtain updated information regarding providers utilizing or able to utilize iRISE employment services.
- Brooke McDaniel will provide the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation meeting information to Anu Kumari, who will distribute the invitation and meeting link to Council members.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

October 22, 2026

9:00 am- 10:00am (EST)