



Secretary
Andy
Beshear

Governor

Jamie Link
Education & Labor Cabinet

Public Policy Committee Meeting

Minutes

September 19, 2024

9:00am – 10:00am

Zoom

Meeting ID: 859 4707 5457

Passcode: 654000

Council Members Attendees:

Diana Merzweiler, Chair

Jeff White, Council Member

Andrew Johnson, Council Member

Staff Member Attendees:

Nanci Howard, Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator

Anu Kumari, Administrative Specialist Senior

Holly Hendricks, Vocational Rehabilitation, Director of Field Services

Additional Members Present:

Allison Johnson, KDE Representative

Members Absent:

Cora McNabb, Council Member
Amy Luttrell, Council Member
Leslie Hoffman, Council Member
Gretta Hylton, Council Member
Katie Wolf Whaley, Council Chair and Member

Additional Members Absent:

Luv Tesha Robertson, KY Office of Adult Education
Susan Brown, Coalition for Workforce Diversity

Welcome

Administrator, Nanci Howard, and Chair, Diana Merzweiler welcomed everyone to the meeting. Nanci Howard provided an update on Project NEON (National Expansion on Employment Opportunities Network).

Neon Project Update:

Administrator, Nanci Howard provided an update on Project NEON, which officially ended on August 31st. While there are no current updates, Nanci acknowledged the success of the Employment First Council's third part of the webinar series, "Enhancing Employer Engagement," presented by Subject Matter Expert, Steve. She highlighted Project NEON in terms of its impact on supported employment. She also provided an update on the recommendations, mentioning that it is on the priority list for the Cabinet.

- **NEON's Assistance:**

Council member, Jeff White emphasized the significant role of Project NEON in the Collaboration with OVR to develop new rate and rate structure and the positive impact it would have on employment in Kentucky.

- **Compensation for Providers:**

Council member, Jeff White highlighted that previously, providers who delivered quality services but did not achieve a positive outcome received no compensation. He explained that the new structure ensures providers are compensated for their efforts, regardless of the outcome. There is ongoing confusion among providers, with many expecting negative repercussions, but reassurances were given that the new system is beneficial, he stated.

Jeff mentioned that marketing and recruitment are now essential to expand the provider base, as the new rate structure allows for sustainable service provision. He acknowledged some fear among providers regarding the changes, but expressed confidence that these concerns can be addressed through education and support.

- **Impact of NEON Involvement:**

Council member, Jeff White noted that Project NEON assistance was crucial in making the new rate structure a reality. He mentioned that this has been a long-term goal for KYOVR Supported Employment Branch Manager, Ron O' Hair, and Project NEON involvement was pivotal in achieving it. He shared personal experiences of guiding providers through the new process and emphasizing the opportunity to deliver quality services without the risk of going out of business.

Chair, Diana Merzweiler emphasized the importance of discussing the assistance provided by Project NEON in developing new rates and rate structures for Employment First services in Kentucky. She noted that previously, providers could not receive compensation for quality services without positive outcomes, but that has changed, which could significantly impact employment services. She expressed confidence that the involvement of Project NEON was key to achieving this change, and the committee members agreed to highlight about the rate structure in their report, emphasizing the need for meaningful recommendations to the cabinet and legislators.

She discussed about the importance of celebrating the success of the Project NEON while also addressing the need for adequate training for providers to implement the new rate structure effectively.

- **Future Collaboration With NEON:**

Council member, Jeff White discussed with committee members the potential for future collaboration with Project NEON. He suggested developing a comprehensive memo of understanding Vocational Rehabilitation between BHDID, that includes various stakeholders, such as the Department of Education, and guardianship systems, to clarify roles in promoting Employment First. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that all parties understand their responsibilities and the need for a comprehensive memo to promote Employment First across Kentucky, highlighting the importance of collaboration among various organizations. The committee members agreed to keep the recommendation general, seeking assistance from multiple sources rather than focusing on Project NEON. Chair, Diana Merzweiler inquired about project NEON funding approach, wondering if they seek long-term partnerships or prefer to work with different states. Council member, Jeff White responded optimistically, expressing confidence that Project NEON would continue to support Kentucky given the progress made.

The committee members agreed to include a recommendation in their report to seek future funding and partnerships with Project NEON and other organizations.

Medicaid Policy Update:

Administrator Nanci Howard shared a comment letter that was approved regarding proposed waiver changes on September 13, 2024. Council member Jeff White highlighted that these changes primarily relate to rates as ARPA

funding is set to expire on December 31, 2024. He noted that this was the first-rate study completed in Kentucky, a requirement by CMS. Mr. White briefly explained the importance of the letter, which includes support for the proposed changes and emphasizes the need for Medicaid to play a stronger role in funding employment services. He pointed out that Medicaid currently spends significantly less on supported employment compared to other programs, which do not promote competitive integrated employment.

Mr. White also introduced a new waiver which allows individuals receiving Medicaid through managed care to access extended services after obtaining employment through IPS funding. This waiver aims to provide necessary support to maintain employment and prevent individuals from cycling back into the system. He emphasized the importance of the waiver in broadening access to services for individuals with diverse needs, ensuring they receive the necessary support to maintain employment and achieve long-term stability.

KDE policy Update:

Allison Johnson provided an update on the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and the IEP guidance document, indicating that the team is open to feedback from the committee on incorporating Employment First principles. She also mentioned the development of online modules for educators focused on Employment First and expressed her interest in collaborating with committee members to create relevant resources.

Chair Diana Merzweiler discussed the timeline for providing recommendations, with Allison Johnson aiming to have input ready by the end of the school year in May 2025. Chair Merzweiler agreed to collaborate with the committee to ensure that educators receive the necessary information about Employment First and competitive integrated employment.

Chair Merzweiler also plans to reach out to Chair Amanda Owen to collaborate on creating a module for their project. Nanci Howard noted that there are resources for educators available on their website, which the committee is collecting, and she provided [LINK](#) for reference.

- **Transition Services:**

Chair Diana Merzweiler asked Allison Johnson to provide a timeline for completing the Transition document, suggesting that it be reviewed at the November or December meeting. She expressed a desire to start analyzing basic documents related to the Transition process. Allison Johnson responded by highlighting the comprehensive IEP guidance document, specifically noting the post-secondary Transition section on page 59. Allison also provided a [LINK](#) for reference. She mentioned that this document is considered essential for educators in Kentucky when planning for Transitions.

Chair, Diana Merzweiler announced the Public Policy Committee will collaborate with KDE and submit recommendations by March 1, 2025. The committee members express agreed with this timeline and acknowledges the strong committee's efforts.

Vocational Rehabilitation Update:

Vocational Rehabilitation Director of Field Services, Holly Hendricks provided an update on the rehabilitation aspect, noting that policies are being updated on a rolling basis. She mentioned that VR is focusing on supported employment guidance and is seeking feedback from the committee on its effectiveness. Holly emphasized the importance of assessing the new guidance and welcomed input from providers who may encounter issues. She noted that while there are no current policy assessments, they are working on updating forms and processes. She offered to share relevant documents from their shared drive to help the committee members better understand the new fee structure and processes, and she agreed to provide these documents to the committee members.

Council member, Jeff White mentioned that the Provider Capacity Committee is waiting for guidance to develop a policy workbook aimed at helping both new and existing providers understand supported employment. Vocational Rehabilitation Director of Field Services, Holly Hendricks acknowledges the need for tools to assist providers in meeting regulatory requirements and expresses interest in developing resources for new providers.

Public Comments and Additional Discussion:

Administrator, Nanci Howard reminded the committee of the October 1, 2024. deadline for submitting their sections of the Annual Report. She shared a sample draft of the Annual Report layout and content, inviting feedback from the committee members. She mentioned that draft includes a cover page, mission statement, accomplishments, and future steps and links to relevant resources. She emphasized the importance of addressing the council's charge in the report and mentioned the inclusion of policy recommendations. She also discussed the training resources developed for families and the outreach activities conducted by council members. She expresses her gratitude for the committee members hard work, and Nanci Howard encouraged them to provide input for the report.

Action Items:

- Chair, Diana Merzweiler will review the Annual Report and provide any additional recommendations or suggestions and send to final recommendation for the committee's sections of the Annual Report to Administrator, Nanci Howard by September 27th, 2024.
- Administrator, Nanci Howard will share the draft Annual Report with the committee member for review and Suggestion.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Division Director, Holly Hendricks and Council Chair, Jeff White will provide updates on input and information for their sections of the report.

- Additional Staff, Allison Jonson will Collaborate with the Advocacy and Education Committee to develop a module on employment first for educators.
- Council Member, Jeff White will collaborate with Nanci Howard to develop the section on Vocational Rehabilitation for the Annual Report.
- The Committee Members will review the Annual Report and provide any final edits or changes by the specified deadline October 1st ,2024.
- Administrative Specialist Senior, Anu Kumari will submit the minutes by September 24,2024 for final review.

Adjournment:

Chair, Diana Merzweiler and Administrator, Nanci Howard thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting with a reminder of the next meeting date.

Next Meeting:

- **Date: November 21,2024**
- **Time: 9:00 am to 10:00 am**

Public Policy Committee Meeting

Meeting ID: 859 4707 5457

Passcode: 654000

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