

# The Commission on Disability and Employment

## 2023 Annual Report to the Governor and Legislature

### Committee Members:

Jennifer Kimble, Chair

Jeanie Coltart

Renee Doble

Gayla Dwyer

Rachel Dyer

Julia Endicott

Railey Guthrie (ex-officio)

Cheryl Peabody

Donald Rice

Karen Fraser (ex-officio)

The Commission on Disability and Employment (CDE) is a statutorily required committee of the State Workforce Board (26 M.R.S. § 2006(5)(B)(2011)). The Commission exists primarily to “advise, consult and assist the executive and legislative branches of State Government on activities of State Government that affect the employment of disabled individuals,” and works to promote collaboration with the public and private sectors to increase awareness and influence policy related to employment for people with disabilities. The Commission is solely advisory in nature.

The Commission provides this annual report to the Governor and Legislature as a summary of its work in 2023 and initial planned actions for 2024.

## ***Summary of the Commission's Work in 2023***

In this year, the Commission worked on its plan as outlined in the 2023 State Workforce Board annual plan, with four strategic objectives:

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### ***I. Develop an educational presentation for broad use regarding the opportunity to expand the Maine labor pool by employing individuals with disabilities on the pathway to Employment.***

Through Commission work group meetings and review and discussion in full Commission meetings, a presentation was developed and ready to pilot by September. The intended audience for the presentation is employers and the general public; the message conveys the capability of Mainers with disabilities and employers' opportunity to expand their labor pool through disability inclusion. The presentation will be available to all members of the Commission to present at local employer / workforce / economic development meetings.

The first step of roll-out of the presentation is to the SWB Executive Committee for initial feedback, followed by a presentation to the full SWB. Unfortunately, Executive Committee meetings were cancelled through the end of the year; this effort will be underway in 2024.

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### ***II. Provide disability-related consultation to the SWB & SWB committees in developing and implementing strategies for the workforce system, including its performance and outcomes for both job seekers and employers.***

In the SWB Committees' restructure, the Chair of the Commission was a member of the Executive Committee. In December 2023, the Chair participated in the SWB / Economic Growth Council / 10-Year Plan Steering Committee joint meeting to collectively recommend a set of updated, or new, suites of actions across each of the seven strategies of the 10 Year Economic Development Strategy. The Chair had opportunity to provide feedback from a disability employment lens to all seven strategy areas.

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**III. Provide support, when necessary, for the development & review of the MyWorkSourceMaine.com site, specifically focused on accessibility issues and resources for individuals with disabilities.**

The RFP for the MyWorkSourceMaine.com website development was released in September 2023 with proposals due in November 2023. The awarded vendor was notified in February 2024; as the contract is established and the vendor begins work, it is expected that this activity will begin.

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**IV. Monitor disability employment-related legislative activities and progress, e.g. potential development of and Office of Employment First and improving Mainers' access to effective employment support services.**

In meetings through the year, Commission agenda items included discussion regarding:

- The [report out of the LD 924 Task Force](#), which was established by LD924, PL2021, Chapter 116. The Task Force studied the coordination of services and expansion for educational programs and vocational opportunities for young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities or acquired brain injury. The report included a list of 11 recommendations requiring legislative action, including the development and funding of an Office of Employment First.
- Progress of [LD 659 of the 131<sup>st</sup> Legislature](#), “An Act to Promote Seamless and Flexible Home and Community supports Across the Lifespan for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities or Autism,” voted ought to pass June 15, 2023. This Act supports the Maine Office of Aging & Disability Services’ efforts to establish a [Lifespan Waiver](#), expanding employment-related services for waiver members.
- The [Comprehensive Behavioral Health Plan for Maine](#) developed by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services in response to from [LD 1262](#)’s requirement to develop a comprehensive statewide strategic plan to serve people in Maine with behavioral health needs across the lifespan. Supported Employment is one required element of the plan.
- Progress of [LD 1339 of the 131<sup>st</sup> Legislature](#), “Resolve, to Establish the Task Force to Study Forming the Maine Commission on Disabilities,” voted ought not to pass on May 9, 2023.

Commission members agree that an increased timely effort to stay informed and engaged on disability employment related legislative activities is needed. While the Commission discussed these agenda items, the Commission did not provide testimony as part of the process and certainly could have. In 2024, efforts will be made to more intentionally support this effort.

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