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## **Governor's Council on Disability Employment Position Paper**

The Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) recognizes that employment is a life defining activity/event for each of us, disabled or not. Employment provides income, a sense of belonging, mental and tangible benefits to a human, and status. As such, it is the position of the Governor's Council that employment policies, practices, and implementation be inclusive and competitive.

- Guiding Principles/Stats for employment:
  - GCD expects that employment occur in the most Inclusive/integrated employment setting.
  - Inclusion means that everyone is welcome in all aspects of employment.
  - Employees should have access to all employment-related and employment-sponsored activities, such as holiday parties, going out to lunch, etc.
  - GCD believes that competitive integrated employment is critical as it brings out the real potential in employees.
  - Individuals with disabilities should be given the opportunity to explore their personal career paths. Workers come from diverse backgrounds, educational experiences, political persuasions, and have different talent levels.
  - Regardless of public benefits status (Medicaid, Food stamps, SSI, SSDI, or other public assistance programs), individuals should be given options to obtain competitive and integrated employment.
  - GCD believes that dispelling myths about persons with disabilities is important and that there are many methods of assisting and educating employers: (1) Hiring people with disabilities (PWD) and obtaining skilled employees to benefit their companies. These employees demonstrate how employees with disabilities actually perform in the workforce—and is the most obvious and useful method of education; (2) Educating managers and HR personnel on benefits of hiring PWDs and developing disability employment hiring initiatives; (3) Encouraging employers to be active in Business Leadership Networks or similar organizations; and (4) Educate Employers about incentives available, including on the job training and tax incentives.
  - People with disabilities believe in “Nothing about us without us.” PWDs should be encouraged to be involved in local and state Chambers of Commerce, local workforce development boards, statewide Employment and Economic Development councils, and so forth.

*Keeping the Promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act  
Affiliated with the Office of Disability Employment Policy*

- With the advent and continuing advances in Assistive Technology (AT), workers, disabled or not, are continuing to challenge human capabilities and become more productive. The continuation of AT research and funding must continue.
- The unemployment and employment gaps between individuals with disabilities and non-disabled individuals is simply too wide.
- In 2014, 17.1 percent of persons with a disability were employed, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. In contrast, the employment-population ratio for those without a disability was 64.6 percent.
  - The unemployment rate of persons with a disability edged down to 12.5 percent from 2013 to 2014, while the rate for those without a disability declined to 5.9 percent. Individuals with disabilities must be afforded the same career opportunities as their non-disabled co-workers. Career advancement and the training that comes with it should be offered to all workers. GCD believes in “Zero Exclusion.”
- Employers should strive to make workplaces welcoming by creating physically and socially accessible spaces, which might include acoustically sound rooms, grade level parking, lower water fountains and accessible vending machines. In essence, work spaces should be built and modified to incorporate universal design standards.
- GCD believes that public transportation should be flexible and available to more employment locations.
- Vocational Rehabilitation and other employment providers should also be aware of and promote self-employment and work from home opportunities.
- GCD believes that employers should establish “Employer Resource Groups” (ERG) that would focus on issues surrounding workers with disabilities. ERGs promote workplace culture by: (1) working with company leaders to incorporate an open and physically accessible environment, (2) make sure that PWDs are well-represented on employee planning committees, such as greeting committees, emergency planning committees, and management; and (3) informing and working with all employees to be more inclusive of all people.
- State government must be leader in employing persons with disabilities.
- There must be better collaboration of agencies to (1) educate, (2) promote, (3) advocate for the employment needs of PWDs.

- Recommendations:
  - Embrace the WIOA and make it work for Missouri.
  - Work to convene an “executive level” commission to examine and ultimately implement executive level employment policies. At a minimum, this “commission” will seek to reaffirm existing policies, but at a greater level, this commission would enact and push forward new initiatives to recruit and hire qualified individuals with disabilities in state government.
  - Make recommendations to the Missouri General Assembly on appropriate legislation that would increase the per cent of individuals in the workforce. Such legislation would include Medicaid Buy-In and stronger tax credit programs to hire persons with disabilities.

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