

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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**Maine Jobs Council
Commission on Disability and Employment**

2009 annual Report

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Vision: A workforce that includes all people with disabilities employed in jobs, which meet their economic and personal needs.

Mission: The Commission on Disability and Employment (CDE) promotes collaboration with the public and private sectors to increase awareness and to influence policy related to employment for people with disabilities.

Over the past year, the CDE has done a great deal of work to amend its bylaws and establish an executive committee to more clearly define its work plan and provide the opportunity to meet future statutory responsibilities.

As a result of this, the CDE will be continuing to focus on three primary areas:

- **Develop CDE Organizational Capacity.** This includes expanding the membership of the CDE to be more representative of persons with disabilities in Maine and to connect more closely with the business community. Given the limited resources of the CDE, it will be essential for us to increase resources as we are heavily reliant on department staff and grant funds to carry out our mission.
- **Increase Effective Partnerships:** This includes increased collaboration with other state advisory committees focused on disability and employment as well as strengthening our work with the full Maine Jobs Council and its subcommittees to meet all of the goals of a fully integrated workforce. Another key aspect of this integration is the CDE's role as steering committee for the Disability Navigator Program, which in our view is essential to ensuring that CareerCenter services are fully assessable for the estimated 137,000 working aged adults with Disabilities in Maine.

Promote Effective Practices: This will include maximizing federal resources, monitoring employment outcomes from Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Adult Cognitive and Physical Disabilities, and Office of Adult Mental Health Services, Data Warehouse for integrated tracking of information, and reexamining the Model employer concept from the Governor's Executive Order in 2006. The CDE's advisory role with the Comprehensive Employment Opportunities (CEO) grant will give us an opportunity to be engaged with a number of these issues. In addition, we have an advisory role to a 'first in the nation' AmeriCorps grant awarded to the Maine Transition Network that focuses on youth with disabilities transitioning from high school to the adult world of work while gaining the skills and abilities needed to compete and secure employment at a livable wage.

In summary, a key part of our work is in the area of public policy, which includes advising the Governor and the legislature on the status of employment of Mainers with disabilities and recommendations on needed changes to increase employment rates and wages for this population. This will be done by monitoring the budget process and providing testimony as needed to ensure that state resources are utilized to its full potential and leveraging federal matching funds to ensure that needed employment services are available.

Key discussions have been surfacing within the CDE regarding its access to advising the Governor. When first formed, the CDE had direct access to the Governor to clearly define the issues facing Mainers with disabilities as they sought out opportunities for competitive employment. In the late 1990s, a merging of several committees/councils took place and created the Maine Jobs Council. This has allowed for a great opportunity to become fully integrated with the workforce development system; however, the full MJC is housed in a Department, which limits direct access to the Governor. As a result, as a subcommittee, we have less opportunity to clearly convey our recommendations to the Governor.

At this time, the CDE has many challenges, with limited resources to carry out its statutory responsibilities. However, we have a very committed membership which will keep us striving to realize our vision.