

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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**STATE WORK FORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**

**COMMISSION ON DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT**

**2013 ANNUAL REPORT**

**SUBMITTED TO THE LEGISLATURE: October 24, 2013**

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2013**

**Commission on Disability and Employment  
Annual Committee Report  
Fall 2013**

**Chair:** Mel Clarrage

**Staff person:** Nancy Labbe

***Briefly describe the mission, goals, and policy objective(s) of this committee.***

The Commission, established by the legislature in 1997, promotes collaboration with the public and private sectors to increase awareness and influence policy related to employment for people with disabilities. Its members envision a Maine workforce that includes all people with disabilities employed in jobs that meet both their economic and personal needs.

***Please list the current ACTIVE membership (not just the list of people who receive committee emails).***

Mel Clarrage	Person with disability, American Council of the Blind of Maine
Avery Olmstead	Person with disability, Advocate
Jennifer Kimble	Maine Medical Center
Rachel Dyer	Maine Developmental Disabilities Council
Jean Coltart	Person with disability, Advocate
Gayla Dwyer	Aroostook Mental Health Center
Gwen LaPointe	Person with disability, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
Monica Elwell	Advocacy Initiative Network of Maine
Donald Rice	Person with disability, Bureau of Employment Services
Debra Hanmer	Person with disability, Westside Neuro-Rehabilitation Services
Deb Brucker	Institute on Disability, University of New Hampshire
Carolyn Lockwood	Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

***If your committee has officers or any subgroups/subcommittees, please list those.***

Mel Clarrage - Chair  
Avery Olmstead - Vice Chair  
Jennifer Kimble - Treasurer  
Rachel Dyer - Secretary

***Briefly describe two or three significant activities/initiatives the committee undertook in 2013. What were the outcomes?***

The Commission on Disability and Employment (CDE) was very active this past year; following is a brief description of activities.

The CDE felt it was important to be very active with other committees; therefore, we participated in the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) Chairs and Staff meetings, as well as the Five Councils in the disability community. The SWIB's standing committees represent women, veterans, older workers, youth, apprenticeship, program policy, and people with disabilities (the CDE). The Five Councils are composed of the CDE and four committees from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services. The federal Rehabilitation Act mandates the participation of the State Independent Living Council and the State Rehabilitation Councils for Vocational Rehabilitation and the Blind and Visually Impaired. State law requires the involvement of the Committee on Deaf, Late Deafened, and Hard of Hearing.

The SWIB Chairs met several times and the primary outcomes are to work at becoming more proactive in the work of the SWIB both on the federal and state levels. The SWIB and CDE value and respect the excellent support from the Department of Labor, however it is becoming clear that workforce development is cross systems and no one single agency has the resources and capacity to address the needs. The CDE has mentioned in previous annual reports the need for closer access to the Governor; the committee is trying to build consensus to have the SWIB explore statutory or policy initiatives to improve the SWIB's effectiveness under the Governor's leadership. The CDE is also very committed with our report card and being data-driven as we establish policies to leverage resources and increase the skills of Maine residents to meet business demand.

The CDE worked with the SWIB and The Program Policy Committee to develop a new policy on data collection:

*All employment and training programs that receive state or federal funding shall collect and report available data on persons with disclosed and documented disabilities and strive to improve the collection of data. This was approved by the SWIB last fall. It is our hope that all SWIB committees will have similar data collection.*

The Five Councils focused on two key areas: Employment First legislation and obtaining feedback from Mainers with disabilities. We monitored the drafting and passage of Maine's Employment First legislation and through the process ensured that all persons with disabilities had the opportunity for input in the drafting of the bill and to ensure future representation in the created three year coalition. The Employment First bill was passed and signed into law by Governor LePage.

The Five Councils hosted the first annual Empowerment Forum for persons with disabilities. The Forum was designed to seek feedback from people on how our system is doing on meeting their needs to thrive in our state. We sought comments on how they are doing living in the community (transportation, housing and assistive technology), their access to employment and training programs, including Vocational Rehabilitation, and what changes would they recommend.

As it is so important to work with employers, the CDE collaborated with Maine's Business Leadership Network (BLN) and the State of Maine as a model employer to increase opportunities for residents with disabilities participating in our workforce. Members of the CDE

joined forces with the Maine State Chamber of Commerce as the BLN Executive Director worked with the State Chamber to host employer forums in the northern part of Maine. Several CDE members served on panels and attended the two events. (Recently, funding for the BLN Executive Director has ended; however, it appears that the chamber is committed to continue the great work of Maine's BLN). The CDE chair has requested that the CDE be added to the executive committee of the BLN. We believe this is consistent with the approved Work Force Investment Act state plan which clearly focuses on a strong connection to our eight chamber regions.

The CDE remained committed to seeing the State of Maine as a model employer of people with disabilities. At the CDE's invitation, the Maine Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) Joyce Oreskovich, attended a CDE meeting to have a candid conversation and offer suggestions with the objective of reenergizing Maine's 2006 Executive Order, which is still active, but unfulfilled. The CDE raised the concern that the order required all state agencies to do a report as to how they recruit and accommodate persons with disabilities and to provide annual updates.

The CDE suggested that in addition to Vocational Rehabilitation's special appointment program, persons with disabilities assign their "Ticket to Work" from Social Security to the Bureau of Employment Services (BES).

The CDE worked with the SWIB to provide testimony regarding bills to address the transportation challenge of Mainers who are not able to drive. As we strive to having a fully inclusive workforce, residents of Maine will need access to all employment services and job training programs in order to gain the skills to become employed. Maine business will greatly benefit as more potential employees will have increased access to transportation. These bills were carried over.

***How did these outcomes and activities contribute to the overall goals of the SWIB, employers, and job seekers?***

See above.

### **Committee Overview**

***Briefly describe any objectives or activities the committee is planning for 2014.***

The CDE will continue monitoring Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act, and the relationship to Maine's Employment First statute. As we strive to have a fully inclusive workforce development system it is important to protect the rights of persons with disabilities afforded under the Rehabilitation Act, and to preserve the professional services provided by Certified Rehabilitation Counselors.

The CDE will continue working with the SWIB, all of its committees, and the Five Councils to maximize and leverage opportunities addressing the above mentioned goals and objectives. This will include carry-over bills in the legislature and hopefully a Governors Bill regarding Maine's

Workforce Development System and the SWIB. The committee will closely examine the National Governors Committee report released in August 2013 and review Maine's *Working Together* 2005 strategic plan to determine how Maine has aligned with the nation. We will report this out next year and offer recommendations for continued improvement.

On August 27, 2013, the US Department of Labor Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs announced a final rule under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that will affect all federal contractors and subcontractors. For the first time, a hiring goal has been introduced – 7 percent of each job group in their workforce must be qualified individuals with disabilities. This rule will go into effect in early 2014. The CDE in this year will become informed about this regulatory change and its impact in Maine. The CDE will be available to consult with the SWIB on policy and operational recommendations for Maine employers with federal contract and subcontract agreements.

***What are the strengths of this committee?***

The CDE has over fifty percent voting members with disabilities representing diverse populations living with their unique challenges. In addition, CDE members come from several agencies and organizations committed to increased employment opportunities for persons with disabilities to earn equal wages in an integrated setting in the community. The membership is very dedicated and strives to gather all relevant information to promote full access to employment and related programs which will increase the participation and employment rates for Mainers with disabilities.

***What are the challenges faced by this committee?***

The challenges of this committee are that the members are all volunteers, and like the SWIB and its other committees, the CDE is underfunded to meet its statutory responsibilities.

***What does this committee need from the SWIB?***

The CDE greatly values the support of the SWIB as we strive to meet our objectives. The CDE would greatly appreciate continued support as our workforce system becomes fully inclusive of all Maine residents.

The CDE would also value the input with our committee of other SWIB members.

***What does this committee offer the SWIB?***

The chair of the CDE is also a voting member of the SWIB and we hope to strengthen the influence of the SWIB. As we offer recommendations that will increase equal access for people with disabilities, it is important that all committees of the SWIB be aware and included.

***Please attach any reports or documents the committee has to share with the SWIB.***

Not applicable.