



ADVOCACY BRIEFING: EMPLOYING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Hall of the States • 444 N Capitol Street NW, Washington, D.C. • September 27, 2012

Opening remarks by Dan Crippen, Executive Director of NGA

Each year one governor serves as the Chair of NGA and has the opportunity to shine a spotlight on one policy issue. Governor Markell has chosen to focus on advancing employment outcomes among people with disabilities. Recognizing that expertise and activity already exist to varying degrees throughout the nation, the NGA initiative will focus on ways governors can use levers at the state level.

Governor Markell and the NGA team recognize that state level efforts are most effective when aligned with the knowledge, experience, and simultaneous efforts of other key stakeholders, including national advocacy organizations. The Advocacy Briefing was the first of several efforts to leverage existing expertise and align with existing efforts.

The Advocacy Briefing was designed to be an opportunity for the advocacy community to hear from Governor Markell about the NGA Chair's Initiative and then to share their knowledge on strategies and practices that work to employ people with disabilities. The attendees represented a range of national advocacy organizations on behalf of individuals with disabilities. The Governor called upon the attendees to offer insight as to what governors should know about advancing employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. The Governor also asked attendees to disseminate information about the NGA initiative to their affiliates at the state level and support state-level efforts in their respective states.

Takeaways from the day:

- Employment is a means; the end is financial health, quality of life, and self-sufficiency.
- Employers are willing to hire people with disabilities; they need help finding workers with skills that match their needs and navigating accommodation requirements.
- Leadership from the top drives change: governors can set goals and states can be model employers.
- Long term change will occur when expectations are the same for young kids with disabilities as they are for kids without disabilities: you are expected to work and participate in all aspects of society.
- Medicaid is the big driver of disability outcomes; embed employment incentives in Medicaid .

Did we miss anything?

- When employers embrace employing people with disability, innovation occurs and the culture of the organization changes.
- All people can work.
- The goal is not just to have any job, but a range of jobs that are matched to the skills and interest of the worker (not just the jobs that are labeled for people with disabilities).
- When we are talking about employment, we mean moving away from traditional models and toward integrated employment.
- Leadership from the top, including the President's 7% rule proposal for federal contractors, will make a big difference.



Request from Governor Markell to the group:

- Submit specific examples of best practices, including new models to replace the ones that don't work.
- Take what you learned about the initiative today and disseminate to your affiliates in their states.

Session Summaries

9:30am – 11:00am: Attendees were asked to answer the following questions:

- 1) What do governors need to know about employing people with disabilities and supporting businesses who hire them?
- 2) What is one best practice in business or government you would highlight to Governor Markell?

Recurring themes from the audience:

- **Employment is not a means to an end;** the end is self-sufficiency and economic stability.
- It's not just about hiring, it's about retention. Enable people with disabilities to keep jobs and move up in careers. Hiring is the critical first step in employment, not the last step.
- It's not just a job placement; it's a career – and supports need to last throughout.
- Enforce existing laws (ADA, Olmstead).
- Persons with disabilities are not a homogenous group. Focus on a range of employment options, avoid jobs labeled 'for people with disabilities' and instead match skills to openings.
 - Best practice: **Customized employment** for people who don't match standard job descriptions.
- **States as Model Employers** - State governments need to model behavior and take the lead to hire people with disabilities. The added outcome is the culture shift from seeing people with disabilities in 'regular' jobs and interacting with nondisabled peers.
- Focus on serving people for whom employment is a significant challenge, not just those who are "easy" to serve; there is a great potential for movement here.
- **States Direct Resources** - Don't fund outcomes we don't believe in: Redirect flow of public dollars to advance competitive employment. Before focusing on new dollars, realign existing money to support employment, instead of day-habilitation programs.
- Accommodation costs (especially up-front costs) may be a perceived or real barrier for employers.
 - Recommended solution: Centralize funding for all accommodations for employees with disabilities.
- **State Workforce Development: Recruitment and Assessment for Employers** - Business is not the primary barrier; employers want to hire people who have the skills they need. States have a role in helping business find people who are job-ready, and providing one point of contact from providers, who know how to work with business.
- **State Processes and Agency Collaboration** - State agencies need to work together with a common purpose, align their business practices, and focus on getting people into and keeping people in jobs.
 - **Oklahoma:** changed payment schedule to pay for outcomes like number of hours individuals actually work



- **State-Business Relations:** States see success when there is a dual focus on supply (individuals with disabilities) and demand (employers) sides, and time the efforts so they match in order to avoid a skill gap.
 - Voc Rehab best practice in states: Business services within provider services, such as Voc Rehab, addresses the 'demand side' and allows networking within state and across country – including access to small business.
- Leverage businesses that are already practicing these efforts. The best salespeople in this effort are local business people who have positive experiences to share.
- **State Policy for Youth in Transition from 18-24** - Raising expectations for youth with disabilities is critical: incorporate community-wide messaging that they are able, and expected to be employed after high school.
 - Key recommendations: messaging from parents and teachers, internship opportunities, and experience on the job.

Governor Markell's reactions/questions:

- Be as specific as possible during discussions today!
- For example: When offering a recommendation for replacing an old model, suggest a solution. When offering an example of a promising practice, send it to us.
- Governors are practical: *how* can we get this done?
- We want to share and use these examples.

11:00am – 12:00pm: Facilitated Discussion: What is working?

Discussion Questions:

- I. What is working: business practices in hiring individuals with disabilities?
- II. What is working: state practices in supporting businesses?
- III. What is working: state practices in hiring individuals with disabilities?

I. *Business practices*

Integrated Employment

- **Vermont** wanted to phase out subminimum wage employment within 3 years, and they did it in 18 months. Now their integrated employment rate is twice the national average.

Businesses are willing and ready to hire people with disabilities, but they need a streamlined interface with government and providers.

Integrate all populations into the broader workforce agenda and have the same expectations for people with disabilities.

- Mike O'Brien (**Oklahoma**) shared information on a pilot program in Duncan, OK that incorporates VR, one stops, the education system, and business. This illustrates an integrated, community-wide approach to employment and advances the concept that work will happen at some point.

Sharing job coaches between companies particularly small companies to spread the costs.



IBM has an accommodation cost recovery program that relieves managers of the cost of accommodations in their budgets when hiring individuals with disabilities.

II. State best practices for supporting business

- **Governors can provide leadership from the top** in the form of Executive Orders, which help focus attention on the topic and set the priority in an era of diminishing resources.
- **Agencies work together to streamline services and funding**
 - For example, **Iowa** has worked with their state Medicaid agency to streamline cost-sharing; they have been able to identify who pays for what, when, and how.
- Increase coordination between VR and Medicaid so people who get employment can keep their jobs and their supports. Blending VR and Medicaid funds (**Vermont**). Medicaid fee for service for supported employment; VR funds help build a provider network for employment support in the state. It is critical to have providers with the expertise to create customized plans.
- **State Benefits Counseling** -States can provide support for benefit counseling to help eliminate the “cash cliff”, since federal programs in this area have expired. Successful state examples include **Wisconsin, Vermont**, and two other states.
- **Medicaid Buy In programs** allow people to go to work and maintain benefits. Otherwise many of these individuals may not be working. Many individuals and families are not aware of these programs; states can increase efforts to build awareness and increase benefits counseling.
- **State affirmative action programs** for contractors with state agencies; equivalent of section 508 for those doing business with the state. (Examples: **Washington, California, Vermont**)
- **Enforcement of ADA and Olmstead.**
- **State Recruitment and Training Programs** - States can play an important role in facilitating development of state infrastructures to help employers find qualified individuals with disabilities to hire; employers have commented that this is one of their biggest challenges.
- **Individualized learning plans** for students with disabilities provide a focus on career and college readiness. Start this in middle school and continue through a student’s education.
- **Support Youth in Transition** Look at youth ages 19-22 who may still be in the special education system; make sure these youth have opportunities to move into jobs/internships and then employment, rather than staying in special education settings. Graduate to a job not VR.
- **Certifying disability-owned businesses** in Illinois; this certification helped entrepreneurs get contracts from corporations with disability sourcing initiatives.
- **Disability tax credit** to allow nonprofit employers to take advantage of the tax credit (Maryland).
- Shift expectations for kids with disabilities and emphasize work as an expectation. Changing this message/attitude will go a long way to shape the future outcomes.
- **Employer recognition** to shine a light on employers, particularly small employers in local communities, that are hiring people with disabilities.
- **Professional competence** – Service people must have the right knowledge and skill sets and an understanding of the industry/employers employing people with disabilities.
- **Create specific goals/metrics within managed care and figure out if it’s possible to incorporate employment** into this. The Medicaid program is one of the most significant tools states can leverage and waivers will create an opportunity here.



III. *State practices in hiring people with disabilities*

- **State hiring initiatives** similar to federal schedule A.
 - Delaware selective placement.
 - Minnesota engages both the state blind agency and general disability agency to implement internships. DOT also targets youth in transition.
- 2005 EEOC report of best practices by state agencies for hiring people with disabilities.
- **Address both supply and demand side**, in unison. Focus on identifying qualified persons with disabilities and coordinate with efforts to work with employers on hiring. Doing both together will be critical to effectiveness.
 - City of Seattle: matching skills to jobs that need to be filled; use external agency to fill city jobs.
- **Incorporate Economic Security** Efforts to improve financial health and stability: Partnership with United Way and churches across the country to increase banking and increase participation of programs such as EITC they might not be aware of. Financial literacy coaching, etc. It's not just about employment, but about financial health.
 - **Delaware** examples: Strong state-level earned income tax credit campaign. Stand By Me program with financial coaches embedded in local employers, including a partnership with the National Disability Institute.
 - The ABLE Act works to encourage savings for people with disabilities who are currently prohibited from saving and earning and accumulating assets for fear of losing benefits. Tax policy can make lives more secure.
- **Change expectations of kids with disabilities** Rather than encouraging 17 year-olds to "hurry up and sign up for SSI," instead put a strong emphasis on the idea of getting a job. Self-sufficiency is the end goal, not employment. **Governors can use the bully pulpit to get this message across.**
- Important to remember that parents are reacting to the systems already in place (parental expectations and paid work experience). Work to change these systems and parents will begin to change their attitudes and expectations.
- **Embed employment incentives in Medicaid** is a main funding source for empowerment services that people rely on, but it's not engineered to lead to outcomes like employment. Embed employment goals within Medicaid and encourage moving toward self-sufficiency.
- **Set goals at the state level for hiring of individuals with disabilities.** Counting and setting goals is not just "okay" but helps put an emphasis on the importance of hiring people with disabilities. Once Massachusetts set a goal for hiring people with disabilities they started counting and the number of people who self-identified increased dramatically.
- Rural communities: micro-enterprise helps to address employment challenges.

Governor Markell's take-aways from the facilitated discussion:

- Expectations for youth
- Entrepreneurship (IL)
- Medicaid embedded with employment targets

Closing Comments from Governor Markell:

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Briefing. NGA recognizes that the advocates hold not only the experience, but the real on-the-ground knowledge of what can and should be done to move the



needle on advancing employment outcomes for people with disabilities. The NGA initiative is dedicated to making a difference. Over the next year, the initiative will make efforts to:

1. Educate both private sector and public sector employers about accommodating people with disabilities in the workplace and the benefits of doing so;
2. Support state governments in joining with business partners to develop blueprints to promote the hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities in integrated employment in both the public and private sectors; and
3. Establish public-private partnerships to build out those blueprints and increase employment of individuals with disabilities.

The Advocacy Briefing was designed to inform the framework of the initiative at the onset. Going forward, we will use the information gathered at the briefing as we move forward with the following agenda:

- Highlight the initiative for governors at the NGA Winter Meeting 2013
- Ask governors to send state teams to 2 regional institutes to learn about what states can do
- Release a blueprint to governors and business for sustaining the initiative's goals going forward

Governor Markell has asked the attendees at the briefing to take these messages back to their affiliates in the states to support their own governors furthering the NGA initiative.