

# Employment First Task Force Recommendations Summary

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It is the policy of the state that earning a living wage through competitive employment in the general workforce is the priority and provided outcome for working-age individuals with disabilities who receive public benefits.

The Employment First Task Force developed and approved recommendations outlined in their first report to the Texas Legislature. The recommendations address a broad range of matters regarding policy, procedures, and rule changes that are necessary to allow the Employment-First policy to be jointly adopted and implemented by the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), Texas Education Agency (TEA), and Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).

## **Legislative Recommendations**

- Establish task force to develop strategies for state agencies to become model employers.
- Include business owned by individuals with disabilities as “historically underutilized businesses” (HUBS).
- Increase funding for person-centered vocational planning.

## **Agency Recommendations**

- Collect data for number of individuals receiving various employment services and outcomes. (HHSC, TEA, TWC).
- Provide information to employers, promote partnerships between employers and agencies, identify best practices for recruiting, and selecting employees with disabilities.
- Establish goals to increase number of individuals in competitive employment and decrease number earning sub-minimum wage.
- Complete / enhance Interagency Agreements: DARS & DADS; DSHS & DADS; TEA & DARS; DARS & TWC; HHS Agencies, TWC & TEA.
- Provide training for direct services staff, agency and school personnel on topics including Employment First; assessing & communicating with persons with significant disabilities; social security work incentives; best practices.

## **DARS & DADS**

- Provide information about coordinating DARS Vocational Rehabilitation services with employment assistance and supported employment in Medicaid waivers.
- Waiver SCs / CMs should inform recipients of availability of person-centered process for planning (including discovery) using the Employment Assistance service option.

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- Expand DARS guidance to staff about strategies to achieve employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities, training about the discovery process and customized employment.
- Clarify DARS policies re: self-employment, support in volunteer positions, support while receiving vocational or academic training.

## **DSHS, TEA, DARS & TWC**

- Explore including supported employment as a core service for LMHAs.
- Publicize school transition program best practices to schools, students, parents and others.
- Implement intent of WIOA including TEA / DARS collaboration.
- Enhanced partnerships of agencies with employers, local workforce centers and others.
- Identify (TWC) workforce service strategies that have most success and share across system.

## **TWC & TEA**

- Establish disability employment committees of local workforce boards & ensure staff in each workforce solutions office has disability expertise.
- Transition planning for students with disabilities should promote community based work skills, supports and employment options.
- Various recommendations concerning students 18+ enrolled in special education programs.

## **Non-Competitive Wage Employment**

- Medicaid waiver rate structure should incentivize integrated, competitive employment.
- Develop technical assistance and financial incentives for workshop providers to convert to supported, competitive employment.
- Prohibit using state funds for services to high school graduates in sheltered workshop programs by 9-1-16.
- Develop plan by 9-1-16 to provide funds to convert sheltered workshops to individualized, community employment.
- Prohibit use of state funds for sheltered workshop programs by 9-1-19.

A link to the full report is available in the left-hand column under “Employment First Task Force,” click on “First Report to the Legislature” at:

<http://www.dads.state.tx.us/providers/supportedemployment/pi/index.html>