

Employment First Council
Inaugural Meeting Minutes
December 5, 2018
200 Piedmont Ave.
West Tower, Floyd Room
Atlanta, GA 30334

Members Present:

Parker Glick
Brandt White
Sean T. Casey
David Ward
Felita Williams
Todd Youngblood
Gloria Jackson-McLean (in attendance for Amy R. Reidesel)
Eric Jacobson
John Wells III
Paula Poulicek

GVRA Executive Director Sean T. Casey called the meeting to order at 10:11 a.m. He welcomed members to the inaugural meeting of the Employment First Council (EFC) and thanked them for taking the time to be a part of the organization. Mr. Casey gave a brief background on the efforts and partnerships that made Employment First legislation a reality. He noted that the Council is fully formed, and that EFC leadership will need to soon be elected.

Mr. Casey welcomed members to introduce themselves and discuss their goals for the Council. Members expressed a desire that the EFC ensure that Georgians with a disability have the opportunity to gain independence through meaningful employment and work to break down barriers that are standing between those who want to work and the jobs themselves.

Mr. Casey welcomed GVRA Legislative Liaison Charlie Miller. Mr. Miller thanked everyone for attending and expressed his excitement about what the future of the EFC holds. Mr. Miller gave a background on home and community-based services as they extended through the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act through the growth of Employment First legislation across the country. As a whole, these efforts translate to real jobs and real wages within the community, he said.

GVRA Attorney Michael Huening briefly discussed the various iterations of Employment First as they already exist in 29 other states, either through executive order or legislation. The largest difference between an executive order and legislation is simply the way in which Employment First was first implemented in a particular state, though legislation often has greater longevity built in. Mr. Huening noted that Employment First not only helps consumers but it also helps employers through the development of the workforce and the financial benefit of tax incentives for hiring individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Jacobson noted that prior legislation mandated that certain federal money can only be used for integrated settings, which is a crucial part of the history that led to Employment First.

Mr. Casey said that the Council must offer the legislature as many options as possible—and no discussion should be off the table—though it will be up to the General Assembly itself to determine which recommendations to take.

Mr. Casey opened the floor for all state agency representatives to give a brief update on their respective agency goals. GVRA, he said, is aimed at ensuring Georgians with disabilities have the skills necessary to find and maintain meaningful work.

Mr. Jacobson said the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) works to create systemic change to ensure self-determination for individuals with developmental disabilities. Project Search, he said, is a 10-year-old program for juniors and seniors in high school that places students in year-long internships at hospitals, with many of these students being hired at those hospitals once their internship ends. He said GCDD is also working with providers who want to move away from day programs to supported employment. Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE) is supported by GCDD, and efforts have been made to expand IPSE to more schools in Georgia in the coming years.

Ms. Poulicek noted that the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) offers over 130 pathway opportunities that can lead to employment, and that support is given to students with disabilities in Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) classes, ensuring that they have the skills to move onto post-secondary institutions or directly into the workforce. She said that various pilot programs through GVRA are currently helping students transition from high school into whatever they decide will come next in their professional development.

Ms. Rios said the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) has a disability employment initiative that promotes change within the system to ensure that tools are in place to give students with disabilities what they need to succeed.

Ms. Williams said the University System of Georgia is working to increase graduation rates among people with disabilities, focusing specifically on workforce development for those students. A key component in this is accessibility and providing resources to students who need accommodations.

The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) has a MOU with GVRA to help fund supports and allow for greater training opportunities, said Ms. Jackson McLean. In addition, DBHDD is working on data collection and growing the amount of information it has to shape policy moving forward. Georgia needs to grow its supported employment among people with developmental disabilities, and DBHDD has entered into a contract with an organization from Oregon who will provide training and technical assistance to grow the supported employment rate for those in Georgia.

Mr. Casey said that he'd like to discuss the possibility that the first report from the EFC to the legislature be delivered during the 2019 legislative session. Mr. Jacobson said the timing of the delivery of the report should be contingent upon the subject matter contained therein. Mr. Huening said it could be as simple as identifying and outlining current funding streams, assessing the existing political landscape and using the initial report then as a jumping off point. There is a tremendous opportunity, Mr. Casey said, to educate incoming legislators and continue building relationships with returning legislators. Everyone agreed that the first report presented by EFC would be a general "state of the state" in terms of what efforts are being made currently. More information will come soon about the specific dates of the submission of the report and the next quarterly meeting of the EFC.

Per legislation, Mr. Casey said, the Council will need to elect a vice chair at the time of the second meeting in February. All nominations should be made by interested parties, and the possibility is open for the creation of other officer positions. The vote will likely be done via an online poll.

Some conversations regarding subcommittees have been had previously, Mr. Casey said, and he opened the floor for other suggested subcommittees. Possible subcommittees include: policy, supported employment, technical assistance, inter-governmental coordination and self-determination. The EFC agreed that GVRA would be the source of communication for the Council.

Mr. Casey again thanked everyone for attending the meeting, noting that communication regarding future due dates and elections will be forthcoming. He adjourned the meeting at 11:52 a.m.