



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

## General Court

State House, Boston 02113-1054

January 2, 2021

Hon. Kay Khan, House Chair  
Hon. Sonia Chang-Diaz, Senate Chair  
Joint Committee on Children, Families & Persons with Disabilities  
State House, Room 146

### **RE: WorkAbility Subcommittee Report**

Dear Chair Khan and Chair Chang-Diaz

On behalf of the WorkAbility Subcommittee, I am pleased to submit this final report with our recommendations to help remove barriers and promote disability hiring practices in the Commonwealth. We are grateful for your support and your blessing of our efforts this term to examine this issue in greater depth.

The issue of workforce development for individuals with disabilities is a vast and multifaceted one. The Subcommittee has devoted considerable time and attention to this critical policy area and no doubt could spend another full term doing so.

We submit this report based on our research, which includes meetings with more than 40 stakeholder groups, 100 disability advocates, site visits to a dozen disability service providers and businesses, 39 pieces of public testimony and a well-attended public hearing at the State House. We traveled to Plymouth, Chicopee, Charlestown, Norwood, Worcester and a number of other stops along the way. We are grateful to all state agencies, non-profit advocates, business leaders and colleagues who cooperated fully and enthusiastically with our work.

Our findings are presented in the report. There is much progress to hail, many lessons to heed, and certainly still more work to be done. A recurring, and encouraging, theme in our conversations with Bay State business leaders is the extent to which many have embraced disability inclusive hiring practices into their business models, not just for altruistic or public relations purposes, but as a tangible boost to their bottom line. Doing so is a business imperative and yields a competitive advantage over companies that do not hire from this talent pool; such advantages include higher employee retention rates, reduced personnel expenses, and stronger customer or brand loyalty. "Hiring people with disabilities is not just the right thing to do, it's the business smart thing to do," was the common refrain.

Spreading this message to smaller and mid-sized businesses that do not necessarily have the same institutional knowledge or advantages is paramount. And some nudges and nurturing from the Commonwealth can help.

This was one of the Subcommittee's key findings, but certainly not the only one. There are many other barriers that impede our progress to broader employment for persons with disabilities. Some are more easily surmountable, while others are knottier and more deeply rooted. In making our recommendations, the Subcommittee has sought to adopt a pragmatic approach, with an eye toward solutions that are specific, achievable and realistic. Some issues are beyond the scope of this Subcommittee and will take continued research, funding and collaboration between stakeholders in order to be fully addressed.

With that introduction, here are the Subcommittee's recommendations. Each is described in greater detail in the Report:

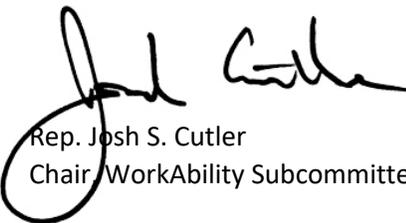
- 1) **Establish a Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.** This Commission is tasked with investigating, collaborating and reporting on issues facing the broader disability community, including employment. (Signed into Law on December 31, 2020.)
- 2) **Expand Regional Employment Collaboratives.** Regional Employment Collaboratives have proven successful and should be expanded to cover the remaining areas of the state, including unserved areas of Western and Central Mass., the South Coast and Cape Cod.
- 3) **Partnerships with Ride Share Services.** Leveraging modest public investments, pilot programs have demonstrated the success of partnerships with ride-share services to address gaps in transportation services. These public-private partnerships should be expanded, especially in areas without robust public transportation.
- 4) **Disability Hiring Benchmarks for Smaller Businesses.** Support a disability hiring recognition benchmark for small to mid-size business to match the successful Disability Equality Index, and involve legislators in recognition programs to promote success stories.
- 5) **Remove Physical & Technical Barriers to Employment.** Review discrepancies between the ADA and current Massachusetts Building Code that create barriers to employment for persons with disabilities. Ensure that state websites and hiring portals are accessible to the visually impaired.
- 6) **Set New Disability Hiring Goals in State Contracting.** The Commonwealth can use the power of the purse to boost disability hiring by expanding an existing Supplier Diversity Office pilot program and include more aggressive hiring goals.
- 7) **Mitigate 'Cliff Effect' with Benefit Management Resources.** Potential loss of benefits is a major incentive barrier to increased employment. Benefits counseling services ameliorate this and provide clearer understanding of potential earnings changes.

- 8) **Enhanced Support for Individuals with Significant Disabilities.** Work with state agencies, Legislature and advocates to bolster support services and monitor geographic disparities in services.
  
- 9) **Establish State House Internship Program.** Establish a pipeline to internship opportunities within the Legislature with the Mass. Rehabilitation Commission.
  
- 10) **Plan Self-Identification PSA Campaign.** A public awareness campaign leveraging public and private sector leaders can help encourage individuals with disabilities to voluntarily self-identify. This fosters a more inclusive workplace culture and aids in measuring progress in disability hiring.
  
- 11) **Promote Disability Hiring Tax Incentives.** Create state tax incentives to promote disability hiring by private businesses and do more to promote existing federal incentives.

The Subcommittee is particularly pleased that one of our key recommendation has already been adopted: the establishment of a Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This Commission will be better situated to continue the work of this ad-hoc subcommittee in a broader way and ensure a strong platform for communication amongst the diverse, public-private set of stakeholders who do so much to advocate for individuals with disabilities.

Again, we thank you for your support of our effort and your continued advocacy of the cause of workforce development for persons with disabilities.

For the Subcommittee,



Rep. Josh S. Cutler  
Chair, WorkAbility Subcommittee

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