Nevada Needs Employment First Now

All people, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable and ready to fully participate in the workforce. Employment First empowers these constituents. An Employment First model promotes self-worth and dignity, and it reduces Medicaid and welfare expenditures for the disability community, which will be better utilized elsewhere. Data shows this model is highly effective in improving lives, but to implement Employment First, Nevada needs a collaborative effort as soon as possible.

**40 States have adopted Employment First**

For too long Nevada has supported small, localized efforts in a siloed approach to workforce development in the disability community. Evidence shows this is not working. Best practices instead demonstrate an integrated approach is key to eliminating both dangerous workforce shortages and rising poverty levels. Employment First is a bundle of programs and policies that create that integrated approach.

According to the 2021 Guinn Center Report on “Integrated Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities in Nevada: An Assessment,” despite integrated employment being a priority since 2014, integrated employment outcomes have continued to decline. The Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities commissioned this data collection since state agencies have neglected to do so. Furthermore, the Statewide Independent Living Council offered recommendations that supported the National Governors Association template for “Promoting Employment for People with Disabilities Through Statewide Coordination” as recently as October of 2021. But no action has taken place to date.

Nevada Revised Statue 427A.121-1217 created the Commission on Services for Persons with Disabilities to oversee implementing the “Strategic Plan for Integrated Employment,” which was established through Executive Order 2014-16. The Commission wrote to Governor Sisolak in 2020 asking for guidance on their oversight role considering their lack of authority over agencies and organizations involved but received no response. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

Employment First legislation will mandate agency compliance and cooperation. Our disability community, who are your constituents, deserve no less. We must discard working in silos and instead embrace compliance mandates that will finally begin lifting these Nevadans out of poverty. If we continue running uphill and against the wind, we will continue to see poor results.

40 states already have either Employment First legislation or an Executive Order established, and Colorado is one such state using an Employment First model with great success that is similar enough to Nevada to utilize their model or approach. Their legislation was designed to establish a commitment to Employment First principles using a collaborative approach. We can do the same here. Let’s make Employment First legislation a reality for Nevadans now!