 11/27/2023

Dear Mr. Hammond,

Congratulations on your appointment to head GOWINN. We look forward to working with you and to share an initiative that is very important to us called Employment First. For years, Nevada has worked to bring competitive, integrated employment to more individuals with disabilities, but has fallen short of established goals. According to Bonaccio, et. Al (2020), the disability population is the largest untapped pool of potential employees, with a proven record of less turnover, fewer accidents, and more overall productivity. Yet, despite the benefits of hiring someone with a disability, the U.S. Department of Labor reports that the workforce participation rate for individuals with disabilities is about 1/3 less than that of people without disabilities.

Nevada has 138,000 people with a work disability, but only 58,000 of them are currently employed (Disabled World, 2023). If Nevada adopted an Employment First workforce approach, we would improve the lives of people with disabilities, decrease costs in our welfare system and Medicaid’s expensive segregated day programs, and improve Nevada employers’ perceptions of people with disabilities. So, as you can see, in our view Employment First is a win-win-win model.

The Employment First Coalition, consisting of an array of community advocates, is interested in working with the Governor’s Office of Workforce Innovation to make Nevada an Employment First state. With you, we could join 40 other states, including Washington, that currently employs 89% of their disability population.

We hope a partnership with you could lead to an Executive Order from the Governor on the Employment First approach. A possible draft Executive Order is included with this letter. If you would like more information, we are happy to speak with you about Nevada becoming an Employment First state and the possibility of the Governor issuing an Executive Order in support of disabled Nevadans who want nothing more than a chance to work.

With Appreciation,

The Employment First Coalition:

Dawn Lyons, Executive Director, Nevada Statewide Independent Living Council (NV SILC)

Catherine Nielsen, Executive Director, Nevada Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities (NGCDD) Dr. Sondra Cosgrove, Executive Director, Vote Nevada

Cindi Swanson, Community Advocate Dora Martinez, Community Advocate

Kimberly Palma-Ortega, Public Health Liaison, NGCDD

Marisol Rivas, Projects Manager, NGCDD

Maxmilllian Lowe, Community Advocate

Santa Perez, Community Advocate

Steven Cohen, Community Advocate

Lori Lutu, Regional Representative, Aging and Disability Services Division (ADSD) Alletha Muzorewa, Workforce Development Manager, Anthem BCBS

Raquel O’Neil, Executive Director, Blind Connect

Valerie Luevano, Health Equity Director, Nevada Medicaid, Anthem BCBS

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