

January 5, 2017

Dear Member of Colorado's General Assembly-

Coloradans with disabilities want to work. Imagine a time when:

- Colorado has the capacity and commitment to ensure that citizens with and without disabilities are participating in the workforce at the same rate.
- Working age adults with disabilities are provided equal employment opportunity resulting in decreased reliance on public benefits.
- Public dollars are used to prioritize real job outcomes over well-intentioned but ineffective programs that unjustifiably segregate people with disabilities and pay people less than minimum wage.

The Employment First policy paradigm, paired with strategic partnerships and investments, can increase Colorado's capacity for people with disabilities to secure competitive integrated work. Senate Bill 16-077 created the Employment First Advisory Partnership (EFAP), and designated the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) as the lead agency. This interagency work group, comprised of people with disabilities, parents of people with disabilities, advocates, service providers, employers, and representatives of the Colorado Departments of Labor and Employment, Education, Health Care Policy and Financing, Higher Education and Human Services is pleased to present its initial strategic plan. The plan includes a range of actionable recommendations that can improve employment outcomes.

The report utilizes a number of facts as a basis for the plan recommendations:

- Increasing numbers of employers are utilizing employees with disabilities within their workforce, capitalizing on efforts by the U. S. Chamber of Commerce and USBLN¹
- Employment strategies that assist people with disabilities are cost-efficient from the tax payer's perspective, returning approximately \$1.46 for each dollar of taxpayers' cost as compared to traditional non-work programs.²
- Disability-related employment policy is presently being transformed by Employment First efforts across the nation resulting in improved employment outcomes.³
- Only 17.5% of U.S. citizens with disabilities are employed while 65% of the U.S. nondisabled population for the United States are employed.⁴

All five state agencies and other EFAP members have actively participated in developing these recommendations. Now is the time to change Colorado's system of employment services to fully support people with disabilities in their efforts to be gainfully employed. Let's get to work!



Amy Smith, SRC Chair



Bob Lawhead, EFAP Co-Chair



Katherine Carol, EFAP Co-Chair

¹ United States Business Leadership Network (2018). https://www.disabilityequalityindex.org/top_companies

² Cimeria, R. (2012). The economics of supported employment. Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation. 37, 109-117. http://www.apse.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/R.%20Cimeria%20economics_jvr.pdf

³ Association of People Supporting Employment First (2018). Employment First <http://apse.org/employment-first/>

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017). <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNS12300000>