

Governor's Office of Disability Affairs

Report to the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council

December 31, 2017

Governor's Advisory Council on Disability Affairs (GACDA)

GACDA met on Tuesday, December 19, 2017, and made recommendations on legislation and developed action steps.

The following are recommendations in regard to legislation for education:

- move Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) move appointing authority to the Governor;
- support legislation to allow teachers of the deaf and ASL interpreters to return to work after retirement if a critical shortage is determined; and
- support collaboration on [LEAD-K](#) legislation.

The following are recommendations for legislation pertaining to health:

- [Fund waivers](#) by appropriating \$4.15 Million in State General Funds for FY19 to provide home and community-based waiver services to 800 individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) on the waiver waiting list identified as having the most urgent needs;
- [Enhance rate for people with complex needs](#) by appropriating \$2.66 Million in State General Funds for FY19 for an enhanced rate in the New Opportunities Waiver (NOW) to support individuals with complex behavioral and/or medical needs; and
- [Fund and implement TEFRA](#) by appropriating \$11.7 Million in State General Funds for FY19 to implement the TEFRA Medicaid State Plan Option in Louisiana.

GACDA also recommended supporting legislation in which 5% of chairs in public facilities are armchairs. Armchairs help our veterans, expecting mothers, the elderly and aging, and individuals with disabilities assist them when getting out of the chair they are sitting in. This recommendation will help with accessibility and inclusion for our Louisiana citizens.

GACDA will also have meetings with regional DOTD liaisons who administer 5311 regarding access to accessible vehicles during emergencies for emergency transportation. GACDA wants to raise awareness of the need for transportation for people who have disabilities or children with disabilities and need emergency evacuation help. The three goals GACDA would like to see for emergency evacuation for people with disabilities are the following: policy changes, locating discrepancies between parishes, and identifying the DOTD liaisons are.

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Disability Employment Awareness Month in Louisiana

[Message from Governor Edwards about Disability Employment Awareness Month](#)

Gov. John Bel Edwards proclaimed October as "Disability Employment Awareness Month" in Louisiana. During October the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs traveled to 10 cities across the state on an Employment First Tour in collaboration with the Louisiana Workforce Commission and Families Helping Families. The roundtables had representation from Louisiana Rehabilitative Services, Louisiana Workforce Commission, Human Service Districts/Authorities, local school districts, support coordinators, supported employment providers, businesses, economic development agencies, self-advocates and other interested parties.

The attendants were able to connect and network with others and give feedback on their successes, concerns, best practices and what is needed regarding employment for individuals with disabilities. During the roundtable discussions, participants talked about information parents and students need to receive to start preparing individuals for employment, navigating available resources, educating employers, and collaborating with agencies, businesses, and other interested parties to create more job and career opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

"Employing people with disabilities is an economic development issue," Bambi Polotzola, Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs said. "The lack of workforce participation by individuals with disabilities is an untapped labor market. We can and we will do better. We are working collaboratively across government agencies and with businesses throughout the state to improve employment opportunities and outcomes."

Louisiana selected as a Vision Quest State

Due to the efforts of the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs over the past year in collaboration with diverse and varied stakeholders, Louisiana has been selected to receive Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) as a Vision Quest (VQ) State for the 2018 fiscal year under the [United States Department of Labor's, Office of Disability Employment Policy \(ODEP\) Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program \(EFSLMP\)](#). Vision Quest States are eligible to receive up to 100 hours of technical assistance to support the state in achieving its goals as an [EFSLMP](#) state. Louisiana will participate in the School-to-Work Transition and WIOA Implementation working group. ODEP will assist Louisiana in achieving results that will positively impact the lives of the individuals that you serve through your state's service delivery systems. Since its inception in FY 2012, the EFSLMP has provided intensive onsite and virtual technical assistance to cross-system state government teams to further their efforts to increase competitive, integrated employment outcomes for all individuals with disabilities. To learn more about EFSLMP, watch this [brief video](#).

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GOV Talks on Employment First

On October 25, 2017, the Governor's Office of Programs and Planning hosted a GOV Talks event at the Louisiana State Capitol on the topic of Employment First and meaningful employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Employment First is an initiative of stakeholders designed to address barriers to employment and improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Panel members for the event included Julie Foster-Hagan from the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, Shannon Joseph from the Louisiana Workforce Commission, and Jamie Wong from the Louisiana Department of Education. They spoke on a range of topics including increased training opportunities for people with disabilities, the transition into life after high school, as well as access and integration of employment opportunities. [Watch GOV Talks on Employment First at this link.](#)

Parishes Focus on Employment for People with Disabilities

The Governor's Office of Disability Affairs attended a productive meeting with Lafayette Mayor/Parish President Joel Robideaux and his newly-appointed Disability Affairs Coordinator, Liam Doyle, regarding employment for individuals with disabilities on the local level. There were other local agencies and organizations in attendance such as Louisiana Workforce Commission, Louisiana Rehabilitative Services, One Acadiana (local chamber of commerce), Lafayette Economic Development, and Superintendent Don Aguillard of the Lafayette Parish School System. We had a very productive discussion about educating businesses about the benefits of employing individuals with disabilities and the positive impact it plays in our communities. We also discussed how better collaboration and knowing what resources are available can help employers and those looking for jobs and careers find employment. Executive Director Bambi Polotzola went over Employment First, which is a national movement for competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities and Louisiana being a model employer.

Assistant Director Jolan Jolivette also had a productive discussion with Ville Platte Mayor Jennifer Vidrine, Evangeline Parish School Superintendent Darwan Lazard, Special Education Director Roxanne West, and Ville Platte Chamber President Camille Fontenot about employing individuals with disabilities and the great progress being made with community based employment for students with disabilities in Evangeline Parish. We look forward to having more productive meetings with cities and parishes all across Louisiana.

Governor's Office Seeks to Highlight Employment Stories

Here in the Governor's Office we know employing people with disabilities is great for our businesses, our communities, and Louisiana. If you are a person with a disability we want to hear your story about where you work and what you do. There are so many positive employment stories which need to be shared, and we would like to publicly highlight our hard working citizens and their employers. [Please go to this link and complete the form with your information and story.](#)

**Before any story is publicized we will ask permission from both the employer and employee.*

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GOLD Awards and Inclusive Arts Ceremony

On November 15, the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs hosted the Governor's Outstanding Leadership in Disabilities (GOLD) Awards and the Inclusive Arts Ceremony at the Old State Capitol. The GOLD Awards recognizes extraordinary individuals and organizations who have contributed their time and talents to benefit the lives of persons with disabilities in Louisiana. Governor John Bel Edwards and First Lady Donna Edwards took pictures with each award recipient and congratulated them on their achievement. Gov. Edwards served as the keynote speaker for the event and remarked that "the GOLD Awards emphasizes the importance of the contributions of advocates and persons with disabilities in moving Louisiana forward. I always enjoy this ceremony because it celebrates great Louisianans who contribute countless hours to bettering our communities." [Watch the 2017 GOLD Awards at this link.](#)



In conjunction with the GOLD Awards, the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs hosted the Inclusive Art Show to bring greater awareness of the importance of inclusion in today's society. First Lady Donna Edwards presented each winner with an award medal. Lynette Fontenot, artist and chairperson for the Governor's Advisory Council on Disability Affairs, provided the keynote speech for the Inclusive Arts Contest. Inclusive Art entries were submitted from across the state and illustrate or describe ideas related to this year's theme "Together We Succeed." Dana Territo of Baton Rouge was awarded the Lynette Fontenot Excellence in Inclusion Award, which is given to the best overall winner. [Watch the 2017 Inclusive Arts Ceremony at this link.](#)



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The GOLD Awards Winners were:

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| <i>Distinguished Merit</i> | Ashley McReynolds, Baton Rouge |
| <i>Patsy Barrett Memorial</i> | Jane Rhea Vernier, New Orleans |
| <i>Ken Vince Memorial</i> | Jay Isch, Scott |
| <i>Educator of the Year</i> | Julie Bourgeois, Thibodaux |
| <i>Youth of the Year</i> | Lillian Dejean, Lafayette |
| <i>Family of the Year</i> | The Pierce Family, Larose |
| <i>Volunteer of the Year</i> | Trach Mommas of Louisiana |
| <i>Employer of the Year</i> | University Medical Center, New Orleans |
| <i>Provider of the Year</i> | Terrebonne Arc, Houma |
| <i>Direct Support Professional of the Year</i> | Latasha Walker, Bossier City |
| <i>Veteran of the Year</i> | Kenneth Carmouche, Lafayette |
| <i>Service Animal of the Year</i> | Bella (Arc of Caddo Bossier), Shreveport |
| <i>Elected Official of the Year</i> | Rep. Patricia Smith, Baton Rouge |
| <i>Public Servant of the Year</i> | Mark Thomas, Baton Rouge |

The Inclusive Art Show winners were:

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|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Elementary Division 1 | 1 st | Kaylee Cook, Ringgold |
| | 2 nd | Shyloh Bell, Ringgold |
| | 3 rd | Emily Grimmett, Port Barre |
| Elementary Division 2 | 1 st | Blair Young, Port Barre |
| | 2 nd | Maci Leger, Port Barre |
| | 3 rd | Zavier Simon, Lafayette |
| High School | 1 st | Hailey Enamorado, Denham Springs |
| | 2 nd | Aurian Hanna, Ringgold |
| | 3 rd | Trey Cunrod, LSVI |
| Adult | 1 st | Dana Territo, Baton Rouge |
| | 2 nd (tie) | Marcus Kilgore, Gibsland |
| | 2 nd (tie) | Jerome Puyau, Erath |

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April Dunn named Coordinator of the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs



The Governor's Office of Disability Affairs welcomes April Dunn as the new Disability Affairs Coordinator. April is the Chairperson of the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council and a passionate advocate for individuals with disabilities. April was instrumental in the passage of Act 833 of 2014 which provides an alternative pathway to a diploma for individuals with disabilities. She is also a 2015 graduate of Partners in Policymaking. She has worked as an intern in the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs for the past six months. April was featured in #ThinkAbility in March 2017.

[Click here to read her tremendous story.](#)

We are excited to have April join our team because not only is she a hard worker, but she has a wealth of knowledge and experience regarding the legislative process and the work which needs to be done to move Louisiana forward and be more inclusive for all Louisianans.

Website and Newsletters

The Governor's Office of Disability Affairs publishes a monthly newsletter, which is posted on the Governor's webpage at <http://gov.louisiana.gov/disabilityaffairs>.