

Governor's Office of Disability Affairs

Report to the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council

March 31, 2018

Louisiana as a Model Employer

We are excited to inform you Governor John Bel Edwards has signed an Executive Order creating the State As a Model Employer (SAME) Taskforce, which will develop policies and strategies to improve within state government the rate of hiring, recruitment and retention of Louisianans with disabilities.

“All of Louisiana’s citizens, including those who live with a disability, deserve the opportunity to provide for their families and engage in meaningful employment,” Gov. Edwards said. “My goal is to ensure that employment within state government represents the diverse reality of Louisiana’s citizens and acts as a model for private industry. In other words, we should practice what we preach.”

“The state government should be a model for other businesses by increasing the hiring of people with disabilities,” said Bambi Polotzola, Director of the Governor’s Office of Disability Affairs. “The state has a vested interest in eliminating barriers to these individuals. It is important that Louisiana recognizes the rights and abilities of those with disabilities to protect our citizens from discrimination.”

The State as a Model Employer Task Force will have the following duties:

- Develop policies, strategies and services designed to achieve the seven percent employment target.
- Establish a five-year plan with annual goals that will enable the state workforce to reach parity with the percentage of working age people with disabilities in Louisiana.
- Provide guidance and other support to agencies and institutions of higher education of higher education on recruitment, retention, accommodation and accessibility for persons with disabilities.

[Click here to read the governor’s executive order.](#)

Over the past year the Governor’s Office of Disability Affairs have held workgroups, roundtables, and other events in collaboration with diverse and varied stakeholders about Employment First, which is an initiative of stakeholders designed to address barriers to employment and improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Due to those efforts, 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 \(EFSLMP\)](#). This technical assistance will further the efforts to increase competitive, integrated employment outcomes for all individuals with disabilities.

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Melanie Washington named Director for SICC for Early Steps

The Governor's Office of Disability Affairs welcomes Melanie Washington as the new Director for the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) for Early Steps. Melanie is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) in the state of Louisiana. We are excited to have Melanie Washington join our team as a valuable member of the Governor's Office.

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 the following link and complete the form with your information and story:

<http://gov.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/form/home/35>

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

2018 Inclusive Art Contest: Working Together

To bring greater awareness of the importance of inclusion in society today, The Governor's Office of Disability Affairs (GODA) invites you to participate in the 2018 Inclusive Art Contest. This year's theme is "Working Together," and we look forward to seeing artwork entries that illustrates inclusion in the workplace or show how we can work better together in our community. Contestants are encouraged to use art to share their vision, experiences, and talents to demonstrate this year's theme. Awards will be presented and winning entries will be publicly displayed at the 2018 GOLD Awards on November 14th, 2018. Anyone in Louisiana of all ages can participate, [and you can find the registration form by clicking here](#). Please call (225) 219-7550 or email Jolan.Jolivette@la.gov should you have any questions.

Website: Newsletters, Statewide Events Calendar, & Resource List

The Governor's Office of Disability Affairs publishes a monthly newsletter, has a statewide events calendar, and a resource list which is posted on the Governor's webpage at <http://gov.louisiana.gov/page/disability-affairs>.