



**Andy Beshear**  
Governor

**Jaime Link**  
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

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## **Kentucky Employment First Council Meeting Minutes**

December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

1:00pm – 3:00pm

1525 Bull Lea Rd.

Lexington, KY 40511

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89812995084>

Meeting ID: 898 1299 5084

**Members Present:** Annette Jett, Amanda Owen, Cora McNabb, David Allgood, Diana Merzweiler, Frank Huffman, Gretta Hylton, Jeff Edwards, Jeff White, Jessica Beaven, Jonathan 'Tal'madge Curry, Katie Wolf Whaley, Leslie Hoffmann, Lori Norton, Merry Reid Sheffer, Michael Rimer, Morgan Turner, Rebecca Wilson, Staci Cain, and Todd Coffey.

**Members Absent:** Amanda Friend, Dawn Gardner, Dina Klimkina, Patricia Seybold, Robert 'Larry' Taylor, and Zach Morgan.

**Staff Present:** Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) Administrator, Nanci Howard, KYOVR Deputy Executive Director, Susie Edwards, KYOVR Director of Field Services, Holly Hendricks, Assistant Director of Field Services, Jonathan White, KYOVR RETAIN Administrator, Betty Whitaker, KYOVR Community Rehabilitation Program and Supported Employment Branch Manager, Ron O'Hair, KYOVR Transition Services Branch Manager, Veronica Dale.

**Staff Absent:** KYOVR Employer Services Branch Manager, Deana Wilson-Kimble

**Special Guest(s) Present:** Sarah Thomas, University of Kentucky (UK) intern, Kellie Smith, Kentucky Special Parent Involvement Network, University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute (UKHDI) Executive Director, Kathy Sheppard-Jones, UKHDI Deputy Director, Johnny Collett, Education and Labor Cabinet Legal Representation, Dondra Meredith, Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities, Justin Jeter, and Executive Director of Down Syndrome of Louisville, Julie Torzewski.

### **Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review:**

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, welcomed those in attendance to their first meeting as a Governor appointed council. A roll call was taken. Introductions were held by council members, staff, and guests. A quorum was established.

**Robert's Rules of Order Resources:** Mrs. Howard provided information to the full council prior to the meeting and asked if anyone had any questions regarding how the meeting should be conducted using Robert's Rules of Order. She encouraged council members to use the Robert's Rules of

Order/Rosenberg's Rules of Order 'cheat sheets' for future meetings. No questions were had and no discussion was held.

**Election of Officers:** Mrs. Howard explained that since there is no chair of the council at this time, nominations can be accepted from any council member. She opened the floor for nominations for chair of the council. Cabinet legal representation, Dondra Meredith, explained council members can nominate themselves and encouraged the council to establish leadership. **Council member, Lori Norton, made a motion to elect Katie Wolf Whaley as chair of the council. David Allgood, second. Mrs. Wolf Whaley accepted the nomination. No discussion was held. Motion carried unanimously.** Mrs. Howard directed Mrs. Wolf Whaley to open the floor for nominations for vice chair and legislative liaison. **Council member, Frank Huffman, nominated himself as vice chair. David Allgood, second. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.** The chair then opened the floor for nominations for legislative liaison. Council member, David Allgood, asked for clarification on what the legislative liaison's role is. Nanci Howard explained there is no clear-cut definition in the law about the role but that she would be working closely with the officers to ensure the council accomplishes their goals and responsibilities. **\*Note: After the meeting, Nanci Howard checked the legislation and it stated, "the legislative liaison shall communicate with the legislative and executive branch about the council's progress and ensure that the work of the council is separate and distinct from the work of the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation. Council member, Annette Jett, expressed interest in the legislative liaison role.** Council member, Diana Merzweiler, expressed interest in the role as well but stated that if Mrs. Jett would like the role, then that would be fine. **David Allgood seconded the motion for Annette Jett. No discussion was held. Motion passed unanimously.** The record reflects current officers, as voted on by the full council, which are:

- Katie Wolf Whaley – Chair
- Frank Huffman – Vice Chair
- Annette Jett – Legislative Liaison

**Subcommittee Discussion:** Nanci Howard then directed the council's attention to the proposed subcommittee discussion. She explained that in the past, previous councils under the Executive Order, established four subcommittees and she opened the floor to the full council to discuss whether to keep them as it stands or make changes and/or additions. She proposed the following subcommittees and opened the floor for discussion.

- Employer Education and Engagement
- Advocacy
- Provider Capacity
- Transition
- Bylaws (ad hoc)

Legislative Liaison, Annette Jett, asked if council members can serve on more than one subcommittee. Nanci Howard stated yes and that her vision moving forward is to conduct subcommittee meetings in between full council meetings. Mrs. Howard further stated the subcommittees would then be able to report out during council meetings on the work they have been doing. She asked council members to consider their top two choices and to let her know what those choices are so she can start scheduling meetings as soon as possible. She then directed the chair to call for nominations from the floor for chair of the subcommittees once discussion is complete. Council member, Cora McNabb, stated Transition and Provider Capacity subcommittees were important as well as the Employer Education and Engagement subcommittee. She further stated the Bylaws subcommittee is needed as well. Mrs. Howard said that she would provide example bylaws

from other employment first states and councils to use as a guide when developing the bylaws. There was much discussion on the Advocacy subcommittee and adding additional verbiage. This was agreed upon by several council members. ***A motion was made by David Allgood that the subcommittee for Advocacy be changed to 'Advocacy and Education'. Rebecca Wilson, second. No further discussion. Motion carried unanimously.*** The record reflects the council agreed upon and adopted the following subcommittees:

- Employer Education and Engagement
- Advocacy and Education
- Provider Capacity
- Transition
- Bylaws (ad hoc)

Council member, Jeff White asked if the bylaws subcommittee would clarify the roles and responsibilities of each subcommittee. Nanci Howard stated yes.

Mrs. Howard stated the subcommittees are allowed to form workgroups under the subcommittees on an as needed basis.

Nanci Howard then continued to explain the full council would need to vote on a chair of each subcommittee.

**Employer Education and Engagement:** Nanci Howard stated that staff support for the Employer Education and Engagement subcommittee would be KYOVR Employer Services Branch Manager, Deana Wilson-Kimbler. The chair opened the floor for nominations for chair of the subcommittee. Council member, Merry Reid-Sheffer, volunteered to be chair of the subcommittee. No discussion or opposition. The council names Merry Reid-Sheffer as chair of the Employer Education and Engagement subcommittee.

Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, asked if non-council members can join subcommittee groups. Nanci Howard state yes.

**Advocacy:** Nanci Howard stated there is no staff support for this subcommittee at this time. The chair opened the floor for nominations for chair of the subcommittee. Council member, Annette Jett, nominated Amanda Owen as chair of the subcommittee. Amanda Owen accepted the nomination. No discussion or opposition. The council names Amanda Owen as chair of the Education and Advocacy subcommittee.

**Provider Capacity:** Nanci Howard stated that staff support for the Provider Capacity subcommittee would be KYOVR Community Rehabilitation Program/Supported Employment Services Branch Manager, Ron O'Hair. The chair opened the floor for nominations for chair of the subcommittee. Council member, Jeff White, volunteered to be chair of the subcommittee. No discussion of opposition. The council names Jeff White as chair of the Provider Capacity subcommittee.

**Transition:** Nanci Howard stated that staff support for the Transition subcommittee would be KYOVR Transition Services Branch Manager, Veronica Dale. The chair opened the floor for nominations for chair of the subcommittee. Council members, Jessica Beaven and Frank Huffman, volunteered to be chair and co-chair of the subcommittee. No opposition or discussion. The council names Jessica Beaven and Frank Huffman chair and co-chair of the Transition subcommittee.

**Bylaws (Ad Hoc):** Nanci Howard stated there is no staff support for this subcommittee at this time

but that she would be the lead and no chair was needed at this time.

***Merry Reid Sheffer made a motion to approve the following slate of officers for subcommittees:***

- Merry Reid Sheffer – Employer Education and Engagement
- Amanda Owen – Education and Advocacy
- Jeff White – Provider Capacity
- Jessica Beaven – Transition
- Frank Huffman - Transition

***Jeff White, second. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.***

Nanci Howard and Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, thanked the those for volunteering to serve as officers of the council and subcommittees. Mrs. Howard continued to explain her vision for the council. She stated she would like the council to develop a strategic plan. She informed the council that the agency has an entity who would facilitate the process for the council and that she wanted the council to start thinking about potential goals and objectives.

**Past, Present and Future Goals and Objectives:** KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, then turned the discussion over to the full council. Council member, Jeff White, asked if Tal Curry was still on the call to talk more about the transition toolkit that was in progress from the previous council's work. He stated that there are resources available from Kentucky Works and the Kentucky Autism Council to help facilitate the toolkit process. Mr. White said this might be able to help the transition subcommittee to get a head start on completing the toolkit. The chair thanked Mr. White for the information.

Council member, David Allgood, discussed some of the previous Education and Advocacy subcommittee efforts. He stated in the past, the subcommittee attempted to create a 'parent network' for parents to know what their rights for their child(ren) to transition out of school smoothly. He stated he believes a video was created to show the steps parents need to complete in order to have their child(ren) transition out of school and into employment successfully. The video was meant to double as a resource for teachers as well to educate school systems on what opportunities are available to students and to become better advocates for students with disabilities. Mr. Allgood stressed importance of the video as some schools do not know what is available such as Vocational Rehabilitation.

Council member, Diana Merzweiler, stated there was discussion surrounding starting the process early (fifth or sixth grade) instead of at 16 years of age. She said the subcommittee was attempting to create available checklists for parents, teachers and students to let them know where each of them are in the process. The checklists were to be posted on the Employment First website and paper copies distributed to those individuals who do not use technology.

Council member, Amanda Owen, provided an update on some of the initiatives that are been done locally where she resides (Owensboro). She began by stating that she is working on developing a coalition comprised of special education teachers, special education directors and curriculum specialists to develop a check list system. The coalition should be completed by March of 2023. The purpose of the coalition is to help special education teachers design a curriculum follows that student from kindergarten to senior year of high school. She stated she is currently working to develop those checklists and hopes to be able to educate teachers and parents on the Employment First mindset. She said if the full council could include this in the strategic plan, then it would be beneficial for

transition and education.

Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, stated along those lines, checklists were already developed looking at employment goals. She continued to state that she believes they were posted on the previous Employment First website. The chair then explained the checklists are broken down by age and exist on UKHDI's website. Council member, Jeff White, stated there are also checklists available for parents and students themselves. The chair agreed and said this goes back to the Advocacy and Education subcommittee where the council needs to make sure they are looking at families and people looking for employment. Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, stated that one of the issues that she would like the council to investigate is how we as members of the council could get those resources out to individuals with disabilities and their families. She stressed the importance of getting the word out about Employment First from the council and establishing a communication plan using the Employment First one-pager located in the meeting packets.

Council member, Gretta Hylton, shared some of the initiatives her and her staff are working on regarding school. She began by discussing the impact the pandemic had on students with disabilities and the research that has been done on the pandemic. She continued to state the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) started thinking about what they can do to assist students with disabilities. KDE started considering what they can do for preschool students since they lost about 6,000 preschool aged students during the pandemic because they returned home. Ms. Hylton and staff really started looking at ways to support them. She also said that the department then looked at the other side of the age continuum where students who were about to graduate. Some students, she mentioned, were missing out on work experiences, transition activities, etc. during the pandemic. The Kentucky Department of Education collaborated with the Office of Career and Technical Education because they share the same students. She said the two entities searched for a liaison who would know about special education and was familiar with Career Pathways. She continued to say they found a liaison from the Fayette County school system. Ms. Hylton reported that within the last six months she has already seen an increase in communication and partnership collaboration and that this process is still very new. Additionally, Ms. Hylton reported the department is to offer scholarships to students who are career ready. Two scholarships were awarded to each district to students who had an Individualized Education Plan that were college and career ready. She reported there were 87 students who took this opportunity, and each were awarded \$2,500.00 to attend the institution of their choice. She said the department plans to do this again in 2023. She also said the department is participating in a 'purpose and action design challenge' and encouraged everyone to view the Kentucky Department of Education's website to view a webcast that goes into great detail of what the department is doing on the above-mentioned initiatives. She said she would send the link to the council. She continued to say that the 'purpose and action design challenge' is a pilot program where the department is in partnership with Eastern Kentucky University, Berea Independent, Woodford County Public Schools, etc. Ms. Hylton said that the purpose of the design challenge was to have students design a work/self-prototype through the lens of accessibility. The idea was to have a more inclusive working environment for students in high school so they would have a career pathway to go forward. She said that it was a positive experience not only with students with disabilities, but those without. KDE is looking for ways to expand on the pilot program but that the ARP Funds deplete in 2024. She asked that when looking at subcommittees, how do we continue the work that the council is doing? She provided an example of the advocacy and education subcommittee and how they could possibly investigate ways to continue the funding for the pilot program. She stated by stating she would be happy to bring staff in that are doing the work to speak to the council about the program. Ms. Hylton discussed how the department has met with the special education cooperatives which are now renamed the Special Educational Regional Technical Assistance Centers (SERTAC) and offered a request for proposal to bolster transitional services within their region. She stated the department has set aside \$2,000,000.00 for this project.

Council member, Cora McNabb, asked a question regarding the scope of transition services for the SERTACs. Gretta Hylton replied there were needs analysis involved and KDE is working through some technical issues at this time but once those are fixed, the funds will be released. She continued to say there has been a staff person hired, tasked with providing any technical assistance the SERTACs may need.

KYOVR Transition Services Branch Manager, Veronica Dale, asked a question regarding plans to provide services post transition services after high school. She wondered if KDE was referring them to other agencies such as KYOVR. Ms. Hylton stated this is where the purpose and action design challenge comes into play because it draws in individuals from the employment community. She stated there are different employers at the table that empower students with the skills they need to go to work. She mentioned a press release that was distributed to 47 countries regarding the pilot program. The pilot program is something that KDE would like to see continue if the appropriate funding is received to continue their efforts in assisting students with disabilities find meaningful and successful employment.

The chair stated that as a council and entities present learn more about what KDE is doing, then how can the council amplify that message through the Employer Engagement and Education subcommittee and reaching other employers? The chair agreed with council member, Rebecca Wilson, when she stated that other employers are willing to do what they need to do for people to work for them. Ms. Wilson believes it is a crucial piece on what employers are doing.

Council member, Jeff White, stated his hope is that the council does not accept someone getting an initial job a success because there are a lot of individuals who are working very successfully and excelling. He continued to state that when that income level increases, Kentucky is not well-suited to provide that safety net that is needed for that individual to stay successful. His hope is to look beyond just getting a person a job and how we can help turn that job into a career.

Council member, Diana Merzweiler, stated there is another level that the council has not touched on and that is provider capacity and the work that had been done previously. She explained that one area of the subcommittee wanted to focus on was that providers who are already under the state umbrella who might be providing a different service who has not thought about adding employment service to their agency. She further explained the subcommittee wanted to reach out to non-profit organizations to train them on awareness and education. Ms. Merzweiler wanted to make sure the Provider Capacity subcommittee was aware of this so they may continue this work.

Council member, David Allgood, stated it was imperative to break down disincentives because it is the biggest barrier for individuals with disabilities and that the council needs to approach this as well.

Council member, Jeff White, stated we need to rescue the providers who were providing employment services pre-pandemic. Mr. White said the reduction in number of providers and number of individuals they are willing to support and that the council needs to work hard to rebuild.

Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, reminded the council to identify themselves. She stated the council and last two years since have developed maps of where the state has capacity and where more capacity is needed. She said the maps are probably out of date but that it could be something that the Provider Capacity subcommittee could possibly revisit. Council member, Annette Jett agreed with Mr. White and suggested round table discussions to investigate why there are significant decreases in supported employment services from community rehabilitation providers (CRPs). The chair reminded the council that the law was meant to be cross-disability and explained the purpose of CRPs and their role in the disability community.

KYOVR CRP/Supported Employment Branch Manager, Ron O'Hair, stated it is one thing to focus in on capacity to try to get more providers throughout the state to make sure there are available options for consumers but that the council also has quality providers and services. He stated KYOVR is looking at sustainability as well. Mr. O'Hair stated there is also a huge need for customized employment around the state and the council needs to look at this from a whole perspective. He further stated there should be great initial and ongoing training, certifications and better engagement and relationships between KYOVR and providers.

Council member, Merry Reid-Sheffer, discussed the need for more providers who specialize in customized employment and stressed the importance. She provided examples from Edge Employment on how the provider has been affected. She sees it as a strategy for growth. She explained how addressing employers so the work of the providers would not be in an up-hill battle and they do not need that much support from agencies, such as KYOVR.

The chair then discussed some of the issues the council had addressed in the past. She said legislation was passed and the body of the council worked diligently to come up with legislative recommendations. She stated most of the recommendations made it into the legislation. The chair directed council members to their packets where there were priority points listed. She said the wording marked in red are recommendations that have already been accomplished but that she would like the council to re-visit the recommendations not included in legislation as well. Furthermore, she stated that one of the recommendations that came out of the Provider Capacity subcommittee in the past was a mentorship initiative for providers. She explained the purpose of the initiative and how new employment specialists would benefit from mentors. The chair stated the application process had been submitted and it will kick off in 2023. It has been funded and will happen soon at the recommendation of the previous council. Council member, Annette Jett, asked if the initiative funding was coming out of the Supported Employment Training Project. The chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, stated yes. Ron O' Hair from the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation commented that the mentoring initiative was exciting and that he received information regarding the program recently in terms of how many people that are willing to be mentors and who receives scholarships. He is glad to see this happening and see where the program is going to go moving forward.

Council Member, Amanda Owen, stated she loved the idea of the mentoring program. She continued to say that one of the things she would like to see come out of the committee is some sort of provider leadership training so they may learn how to operate a business while producing quality outcomes. The chair agreed and said the subcommittee should work on the development of training programs for providers because in legislation it states that the council is to develop training and resources to promote the hiring of people with disabilities. Great suggestion, the chair stated.

Council member, Frank Huffman, said there is a law where if a company has so many employees, they must hire people with disabilities. That includes, he explained, any type of disability. He provided an example of diabetes and anxiety. He wanted to see if there was any way the council could investigate this further to see if a certain number of employees must have developmental disabilities. Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, asked if Mr. Huffman was referring to a federal law where if a company has so many employees, 7% must be those with disabilities if the employer receives federal funds. She explained the council may not be able to influence federal law but that if there was something on a state level, it could be up for discussion. She then briefly discussed how the council could promote employer engagement. Council member, Merry Reid Sheffer, agreed with Frank Huffman's comment. She said she noticed some employers are not even meeting the 7% requirement. She stated if there was any strategy developed where the council is engaging employers that would prioritize more significant barriers to those seeking employment. Council member, Jeff White, stated that the council should look in a micro fashion because each council

member works with people and providers. Mr. White continued to state, that sometimes the council needs to look at it from a macro perspective as well. He said that Employment First is new in Kentucky and the council may need to be prepared to aid other agencies in Kentucky to meet the directive that is Employment First. He said not many agencies accommodate the fact that employment should be the first option for those with disabilities. There need to be changes in those systems, he stated, and that the council needs to be prepared to help those agencies to understand what Employment First is although he does not know where this topic would fall under which subcommittee. The chair agreed with his comments.

**Public Comment:** Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley opened the floor for public comment. KYOVR Assistant Director of Field Services, Jonathan White, made a comment that the program that the Kentucky Department of Education is participating in is exciting and that he loves the idea of businesses talking to businesses. The chair explained the Chamber of Commerce partnered with the Employment First council and HB 144 Commission in the past and to facilitate a summit where employers could meet with other employers. Executive Director of Down Syndrome of Louisville, Julie Torzewski, made the comment that she was there to listen and be involved and thanked the council for allowing her to participate. UKDI staff, Kathy Sheppard-Jones, put in the chat box that the summit would be held in September 2023. No other discussion was held.

**Next Meeting Date:**

Friday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
1:00pm – 3:00pm  
Hybrid Format  
Location: TBD

**Adjournment:** *A motion was made to adjourn by David Allgood. Multiple council members, second. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.*



