



Governor Cuomo Signs Executive Order to push Employment First in the State! September 30, 2014

On behalf of New York State APSE (NYS APSE), a membership organization with an exclusive focus on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities, we congratulate Governor Cuomo and the many New Yorkers with disabilities on the passage of New York's Employment First policy. We applaud the governor's efforts to improve integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities through making New York an Employment First state!

In New York, only 32% of working-age adults with a disability are in the workforce compared to 75.6% of those without a disability.¹ However, we know that individuals with disabilities want to join the workforce in integrated, community-based employment at minimum wage or higher, alongside their peers without disabilities, but many cannot due to barriers established in the current system.² By signing an executive order to establish an Employment First Commission, Governor Cuomo has taken an essential first step to making a clear legislative statement that will reflect New York's commitment to ensuring New Yorkers with disabilities can achieve a lifestyle that approximates that of individuals without disabilities.

Highlights of the Executive Order:

- The Governor has set a tentative goal of a 5% increase in the employment rate and a 5% decrease in the poverty rate among individuals with disabilities;
- The initiative aims to register 100 businesses that have formal policies to hire individuals with disabilities as part of their workforce strategy;
- The Employment First Commission will be comprised of representatives from the Governor's office and State agencies and it will be tasked with promoting the state's comprehensive plan for regarding the competitive integrated employment of individuals with disabilities;
- The Commission will make recommendations to the Governor concerning the implementation of Employment First practices by the following actions:
 - Reviewing available supports and services and aligning policies and procedures;
 - Identifying barriers and disincentives and ways to reduce or eliminate such barriers;
 - Ensuring that both private and public sector employers maximize opportunities to hire individuals with disabilities;
 - Prioritizing a focus on transition-aged students with a focus on competitive integrated employment as the first option; and
 - Expanding data collection to better measure the employment of New Yorkers with disabilities.
- Lastly, under direction from the executive order, the Commission will seek guidance from individuals with disabilities, advocacy organizations, service providers, businesses, and members of the community.

¹ <http://www.disabilitystatistics.org>

² <http://www.thearc.org/document.doc?id=3672>



The recently signed executive order will be implemented immediately and it will provide support to the state's move away from sheltered work settings.

As an organization that promotes policies which enhance the social and economic inclusion and empowerment of citizens with disabilities, APSE strongly supports the concept that all citizens deserve access to "real jobs with real wages." Through APSE's hard work, and from support from advocates around the country, we have seen twenty-seven states adopt an official Employment First policy (based on legislation, policy directive, etc.).³ New York has now joined this national movement that has been a catalyst for increasing the workforce participation rate for individuals with disabilities!

NYS APSE has been an active participant in the development of the executive order and we hope to continue to our partnership and support as an advocacy organization focused exclusively on integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. As NYS APSE Chapter President Jim Scutt states: "NYS APSE looks forward to helping achieve an increase in the employment rate for New Yorkers who receive services in the state." Thank you Governor Cuomo for your leadership and we hope to support you to boost awareness for this important legislation that will help increase integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in New York!

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³ [http://www.apse.org/docs/Employment%20First%20List%209-13%20\(APSE%20version\).pdf](http://www.apse.org/docs/Employment%20First%20List%209-13%20(APSE%20version).pdf)