

Employment First Legislative Meeting Minutes

November 7, 1-4pm

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Representative Ellyn Hefner

- Introductions
 - Provided an introduction on 14c
 - Referenced states that have phased out subminimum wage (SMW)
 - Supporters: phasing out 14c has improved quality of life
 - Opponents: worried about job loss
- Opening remarks on the purpose of forming the Employment First Taskforce
 - If 14c is phased out, we need a timeline
 - Employers need to work with agencies

RoseAnn Duplan, Oklahoma Disability Law Center

- Overview of recent developments in the elimination of subminimum wages on the national level
 - Provided a current snapshot of 14c in Oklahoma
 - Since the interim study in 2023, Oklahoma has had a 14% increase in the use of 14c certificates
 - 2023: 1,073 people earning SMW
 - 2024 (as of the meeting): 1,221
 - 2015: Oklahoma Employment First Act was passed
 - Provided a definition of CIE and integrated employment setting
- Key initiatives and legislation
 - 15 states have phased out 14c
 - Nationally, the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act (TCIEA) has been introduced (HR1263)
 - Would establish an advisory council to phase out 14c nationwide
 - Would provide \$200 million over 5 years to assist states with the phase out

Deborah Copeland, DRTC

- Challenges and successes
 - Employment First is the overall plan, but it is not the only thing
 - Employment First is a systems change framework
 - Employment First should be the first option, not the only option
 - People living with disabilities have to be offered the same opportunity as others (fail, get a new job, grow)
 - SMW is not aligned with CIE and Employment First
 - Typically a 5-10 year process for states to phase out 14c
 - ODEP supports funding to help states with the phase out
 - Blending, braiding and sequencing of services

Janie Fugitt and Melinda Bunch, OKDRS

- Issue
 - DRS counselor capacity
 - Rural recruitments
 - Transportation, especially in rural Oklahoma
- Need: staff (trainings may take up to one year), and more counselor programs
- When a participant reaches stabilization, DRS works with DDS for seamless services
- Funding is an issue
 - Restrictive rules regarding funding & its use
 - However, DRS is getting the right people together for these conversations
- RoseAnn: sequencing exhausts services from one service provider to another
 - Is there an effort to braid services?
 - Answer: Yes, they're getting those people together
- Rep. Hefner: we need to do a better job explaining to people with limited knowledge, and we have to remember what we're talking about.
- Deborah: DRS funding must be used first (before DHS/DDS funds)
- RoseAnn: seeking an update on Customized Employment
 - Melinda: that's coming soon
 - Customized Employment is much more individualized; it's job creation
 - Rep. Hefner: go with a person's interests

Renee Heath, OKDHS/DDS

- Renee is one of two programs managers for DHS/DDS
- CIE is a key goal in Oklahoma
- Oklahoma is one of the top states for CIE
- Touted success of the recently approved rate increase
 - Technology advancements provide support in the workplace
- Challenges to service delivery if/when 14c is phased out:
 - Providers might be less competitive
 - Providers may close their workshops
 - If this happens, more staff may be needed in different capacities (day-hab, residential)
- Value-based payments (authorized in 2020) have been a big help
 - Incentive payments for individual/group placements

Stakeholder Input

Lauren Branch, President/CEO, NewView Oklahoma

- Discussed trends on a national level
- NewView has a 10-state reach
- NewView used to have a 14c certificate & sheltered workshop
 - They needed this for State Use
 - Has since been removed as a requirement
- Lauren: We need to be sure we're putting a plan in place that works for Oklahomans
- TCIEA could be included in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) Act
- Concern: benefits cliff and minimum wage
- Need to educate all parties about employment
- Oklahoma transition services start at 16 years old

Joel Bain, Executive Director, Mid-Del Group Home

- There is a disconnect between Mid-Del and the state level
- How is 14c phaseout going to be funded so Mid-Del (and others) don't close their doors?
- Mid-Del operates 4 group homes and one sheltered workshop (32-40 people)
- They feel like a customized employment solution
- Mid-Del also volunteers in the community
- Integrated employment in the community is a lot faster-paced
- Individuals at Mid-Del feel safe; no worry of feeling bullied
- The money earned in the workshop is their "fun money" since the state funding assists with cost of living
- Going away from 14c would take 25% of their budget
- Can't put everyone in the same box

Joann Horn, Parent Advocate

- Lawyer for a parent of someone at Mid-Del; was largely unaware of 14c and could not find much information on it when searching online
- Individual concerns
 - Could people living with disabilities lose their benefits?
 - Could create a revolving door when navigating benefits
 - Need to try and keep people living with disabilities from being on the street
 - Blending, braiding and sequencing sound great, but how do they work?
 - What does it mean to stabilize and what happens when it falls apart?

Brian Smith, DRTC Board Member, Self-Advocate

- We're all here for the betterment of people living with disabilities
- How can we maximize someone's abilities?
- Allow them to grow

Sue Gill and Kolby Gill, Parent and Self-Advocate

- Shared Kolby's employment journey from Wings to DRTC
- Talked about her interests, and how she's ready to take the next step in this path
- Rep. Hefner: it's key to find what you like and a job that fits that

Nancy Klos, Parent Advocate

- Speaking as a parent, and also for fellow DRTC parent Rebecca Reynolds
- Nancy's son, Martin, works at DRTC
 - Pay differentiates him as an adult
 - Telling people about his job brings him dignity
- Questions:
 - What is the outcome anticipated?
 - Is there a consideration of other things?
 - What does the term "productive" mean for people living with disabilities?
 - Is providing accommodations something that would be included?

Deborah Copeland, Executive Director/CEO, DRTC

- DRTC is transitioning from piece rate to hourly
- The fact someone receives benefits doesn't mean they have to lose them

Robin Arter, Executive Director, ThinkAbility

- ThinkAbility serves 109 people
- They saw the writing on the wall and phased out 14c at their agency
- They offer screen printing and a community garden
- Our people are dependable

Next Steps

- Rep. Hefner may run legislation again (forming a recognized Task Force)
- Rep. Hefner: DRS needs to simplify the application process
- Next meeting: possibly December 4
 - Additional topics should include:
 - Funding structures
 - Service delivery systems
 - Benefits navigation
 - Transportation
- RoseAnn: we want to be proactive
 - Funding is one of the biggest issues