

Gov. Beshear Celebrates National Disability Employment Month, 50th Anniversary of Rehabilitation Act of 1973 during October

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Oct. 3, 2023) – Gov. Andy Beshear is celebrating National Disability Employment Month and the 50th anniversary of the passage of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 in October to recognize the importance of ensuring people with disabilities have equal opportunity to prepare for and succeed in employment.

“Fifty years ago, the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first federal legislation to address access and equity for people with disabilities and it laid the foundation for the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990,” said Gov. Beshear. “While we have more work to do, it is important to mark how far America has come in including all people with disabilities in all aspects of society including education and workforce.”

Kentucky is joining the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy in recognizing National Disability Employment Awareness Month, an annual campaign that seeks to educate about disability employment issues and celebrate the contributions of America’s workers with disabilities. National Disability Employment Month has been observed since 1945 when it started as a week-long celebration and focused on people with physical disabilities. This year’s theme is “Advancing Access and Equity.”

The passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first federal legislation to prohibit discrimination based on disability in employment by federal agencies, contractors and recipients of federal funds, and in the delivery of federally funded programs and activities.

Statistics show that the workforce participation rate for working-age individuals with disabilities is about one-third of that of people without disabilities. In addition, working-age adults with disabilities live below the poverty line at twice the rate of the general population.

To promote the hiring of people with disabilities, the [Office of Vocational Rehabilitation](#) and the [Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#) in the Education and Labor Cabinet are offering employers a free handbook called [Hiring Deaf and Hard of Hearing Employees](#).

“We are excited to be a part of the crucial work of building an inclusive workforce in our state that promotes the recruitment and hiring of individuals with disabilities,” said Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Executive Director Cora McNabb.

“KCDHH staff works diligently to remove barriers that limit people of all ages with hearing loss,” said KCDHH Executive Director Anita Dowd. “My hope is that, through awareness, the work of Kentucky’s Employment First Council and our recently published guide, “Hiring Deaf and Hard of Hearing Employees,” more hiring managers will consider people with disabilities, including those with hearing loss.”

Gov. Beshear has been an advocate of including all Kentuckians with disabilities who choose to pursue a job in the workforce. He signed into law Senate Bill 104 last year to establish the

Employment First Council to strengthen Kentucky’s commitment to increase and support meaningful employment of people with disabilities who desire to work in the general workforce regardless of the level of their disability. The law also assures that competitive and integrated employment in the community is the first and primary option for working-aged people with disabilities who desire employment, and that state policies and regulations are in line with that goal.

“We are committed to breaking down barriers to employment for people with disabilities who want a career. All of our citizens deserve an opportunity for a meaningful job with competitive pay, and this law puts an emphasis on making employment the first and preferred option for people with a disabilities. The Employment First Council combines the strengths of all of the private and public groups that represent people with disabilities to move this issue forward,” the Governor said.

Kentucky’s Employment First Council is a 28-member advisory group comprised of people with disabilities, family members, employers, providers and state agency personnel. The council is administered and housed in the [Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation](#) (OVR) in the Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet and acts as an advisory group to state government to fulfill the law.

Click [Employment First Council](#) to learn more.