

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LABOR AND INDUSTRY COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT
AND UNEMPLOYMENT
PUBLIC HEARING

STATE CAPITOL
HARRISBURG, PA
ROOM 60
EAST WING

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2021
10:30 A.M.

BEFORE:

HONORABLE KATE KLUNK, MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN
HONORABLE JIM COX, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE DAVID DELLOSO, MINORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE DAWN KEEFER
HONORABLE LORI MIZGORSKI
HONORABLE MORGAN CEPHAS
HONORABLE BARBARA GLEIM

*Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*

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COMMITTEE STAFF PRESENT:

- JOHN SCARPATO
MAJORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
- JONAS RICCI
RESEARCH ANALYST
- MCCLAIN FULTZ
RESEARCH ANALYST
- JENNIFER DODGE
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

- HALEY SALERA
MINORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
- EVAN FRANZESE-PETERSON
RESEARCH ANALYST

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SUBMITTED WRITTEN TESTIMONY

* * *

(See submitted written testimony and handouts
online.)

P R O C E E D I N G S

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3 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Good morning.
4 I would like to call to order the House Labor and
5 Industry Subcommittee Hearing on Employment and
6 Unemployment on the Office of Vocational Rehab,
7 Vocational Rehab Service Provider, and the
8 Employment First Oversight Commission.

9 If you would all join me as able -- and
10 join me in the Pledge of Allegiance, please.

11 Thank you.

12 (Whereupon, the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.)

13 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you.

14 I would like to announce that this
15 meeting is being recorded. And members and
16 guests, I would ask that you please silence your
17 cell phones and any other electronic devices at
18 this time. I called this hearing to provide our
19 subcommittee members with an update on the Office
20 of Vocational Rehab and the Employment First
21 Oversight Commission.

22 This morning, we will hear from the
23 Office of Vocational Rehab, as well as OVR
24 service providers. Then, we will receive an
25 overview of the 2021 EFOC annual Report from two

1 EFOC Commissioners.

2 It is well known that we are facing a
3 workforce shortage here in this Commonwealth and
4 across our nation. The public and policymakers
5 alike often discuss what can be done to fill the
6 ever-growing number of jobs that are available in
7 our economy. Far too often in these
8 conversations, little is said about the untapped
9 resource that we have in this Commonwealth with
10 those who have disabilities.

11 They are certainly eager to join our
12 workforce and gain competitive employment. And
13 today we are here to hear about the variety of
14 trading opportunities and support services that
15 are available for those individuals with
16 disabilities who are already a part of our
17 workforce and those who are eager to join it.
18 The workforce shortage is a problem that affects
19 each and every one of us, and it's going to take
20 all of us to do something about it.

21 With that, I would like to turn it over
22 to my Chairman, Representative Delloso, for
23 opening remarks.

24 MINORITY CHAIRMAN Delloso: I'll be
25 brief. I'm looking forward to the testimony

1 today and I'm anxious to get going.

2 Thank you.

3 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: And I would
4 like to recognize -- we have some members here in
5 attendance. Some are online and some will be
6 joining us as the hearing progresses, both in
7 person and online.

8 And I would like to recognize
9 Representative Barb Gleim from Cumberland County.
10 She is not a Committee member on the
11 Subcommittee, but a member of the larger Labor
12 and Industry Committee and we just appreciate her
13 coming today.

14 Also online, we have Representative Lori
15 Mizgorski from Allegheny County. Thank you so
16 much for joining us.

17 With that, I will introduce our first
18 office of Vocational Rehabilitation and
19 vocational rehabilitation service providers who
20 will be presenting here to the Subcommittee.
21 After all of the panelists have testified, we
22 will then open it up for questions.

23 Again, I would ask our panelists to stick
24 to, you know, your talking points. You don't
25 have to read directly from the testimony that you

1 have provided to us. We have those. And we
2 would certainly love extra time for questions.

3 So with that, we have on our first panel
4 the Department of Labor and Industry Office of
5 Vocation Rehabilitation, Shannon Austin, the
6 Executive Director; from Cambria County
7 Association for the Blind and Handicapped, John
8 Stahl, who is their Director of Rehabilitation,
9 Ken Biter, Senior Assistant Director of
10 Rehabilitation; and then from the Pennsylvania
11 Statewide Independent Living Council, we have
12 Jeff Iseman, Public Policy and Outreach
13 Coordinator.

14 So with that, I will turn it over to
15 Shannon Austin, Executive Director. Thank you,
16 Shannon, for joining us.

17 And if you can, please press the button
18 in the middle of your microphone and pull the
19 microphone towards you so that we can hear.
20 Sometimes it's hard to pick up, but we want to
21 make sure those who are watching at home can hear
22 you. And when you're done speaking, just turn
23 the button off.

24 MS. AUSTIN: Perfect. Can you guys hear
25 me now?

1 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Yes.

2 MS. AUSTIN: Okay. I think I can hear
3 myself talking.

4 So it's a pleasure to be here with the
5 Committee today and just being able to give an
6 overview of what OVR has been up to and how we've
7 been busy implementing services throughout the
8 Commonwealth.

9 OVR has been extremely busy. We have
10 currently nine priorities that we have really
11 focused on as an agency in implementing our
12 services. I'm going to give you those nine
13 priorities and maybe focus on a couple of them
14 during my allotted time.

15 One, the first priority that we have been
16 focused on is really maximizing employment
17 outcomes for individuals with disabilities and
18 making sure they have opportunity, equity, and
19 independence in seeking after job opportunities
20 within the Commonwealth. As we know that 69
21 percent of individuals that have disabilities are
22 currently without -- are not in the labor market
23 and we want to try to increase those outcomes as
24 we work with them to make sure that they are
25 independent within the Commonwealth.

1 The second priority is really recruitment
2 and retention and trying to get and engage a
3 competent professional workforce. We've had some
4 barriers over the last year, year and a half with
5 staffing issues, but we want to make sure that
6 we're getting competent people. So there are
7 some things that we're doing behind the scenes to
8 try to rectify some of the things with the
9 staffing shortages.

10 Area three, optimize technology to better
11 advance the work that the Agency is doing, making
12 sure that we have accessible platforms for
13 working with individuals we work with, making
14 sure that there's automation when necessary, and
15 that we can increase the internal and external
16 controls with communication and working with the
17 governing stakeholders as an agency.

18 We have found during the pandemic that
19 we've been able to utilize various technologies
20 during this time, and we're still continuing to
21 procure those, and impacts so many areas beyond
22 just face-to-face that a lot of our customers
23 have access to. Everything from DocuSign,
24 cutting down windows of time, whether it's that
25 application time, eligibility, or plan, we are

1 also in the process of procuring Zoom, going
2 through that process to make sure that we have a
3 platform, so whether we are doing internal
4 meetings with those that need interpreters or
5 have vision loss, that it's a better experience
6 for them, or even working with stakeholders
7 externally, having meetings, whether it's
8 individual consults or group work, that we have
9 platforms to make it more accessible for them.

10 we also have really focused and continue
11 to focus on providing or making our customer
12 service experience more robust within the Agency
13 for our customers, employers, stakeholders, and
14 employees within the Commonwealth. We know
15 historically there has been a delay in timeliness
16 at times with our customers, but also, it's
17 something that we know that trying to create
18 consistency across the State is something that
19 we're trying to do by looking at our systems
20 currently that we have within the Commonwealth to
21 improve those outcomes for our customers.

22 we have been doing a lot of continuous
23 improvement within the Commonwealth and looking
24 at all our systems that we currently have in
25 place, whether it's our application process, how

1 people are deemed eligible within our system, how
2 we're on-boarding staff. One of the things that
3 we have found that, you know, being in this
4 State, systems can be very -- there's a lot of
5 bureaucracy. There's a lot of -- one of the
6 things I tell my staff, if you have a one-page
7 document and you need a three-page document in
8 order to fill out the form, then we probably need
9 to lessen and streamline it a little bit.

10 So we're looking at a lot of the systems
11 that are currently in place, for one reason or
12 another, whether it was last administration,
13 things that we need to realign in the Agency,
14 going from WIA to WIOA, when we had the change
15 back in 2015 to make sure that we're more in sync
16 with how we're serving people and that there's
17 access.

18 The thing that we've probably been
19 spending about a year and a half looking at RSA
20 monitoring Report. We are resolving and trying
21 to remediate and correct any type of actions that
22 we have findings because of the RSA monitoring
23 Report that came in August of 2019. We were
24 issued a corrective action plan November of last
25 year, and we continue to want work through that

1 with the findings. It had everything to do with
2 timeliness on eligibility standards.

3 There was some policy and training issues
4 that were at the forefront. There were issues
5 also that had to do with the fiscal management of
6 our grant. And then there were areas and us not
7 having an MOU in place with the Department of
8 Education. So from the time they came here in
9 August of 2019 to current, we still continue to
10 work through that. Some of those things have
11 been remediated, and then some we continue to
12 work through.

13 with that being said, we also, because of
14 the monitoring Report, we continue to have
15 bimonthly meetings with RSA to make sure that
16 we're getting technical assistance. We have
17 three comprehensive technical agreements with the
18 tech centers, which are centers that have very --
19 specialization that are being funded by RSA. So
20 we have agreements in place to look at everything
21 from quality assurance, fiscal issues, policy
22 development.

23 One of those I think you guys heard from
24 Carole Clancy just a month and a half ago, I
25 think, where she talked about the MOU between the

1 Department of Education and OVR. That was a
2 two-year process in which we utilized one of the
3 tech centers to shepherd the MOU and place and
4 implement that in March of this year.

5 We also have a priority to increase
6 referrals and increase our outreach efforts to
7 make sure that we are working with diverse
8 populations throughout the State. Those that are
9 very specialized, like the deaf/blind, we're
10 working very vigorously to try to engage with
11 them, to outreach with them. We're also trying
12 to work with those that have English as a
13 secondary language that we're trying to engage
14 with and working with various liaison sites,
15 community rehab programs across the State so that
16 we increase our outreach to various populations.

17 And then also, we have been -- there's
18 been a focus on business service and outreach
19 division, where we are trying to get presence
20 throughout the State to make sure that we have --
21 in our system, we have a dual customer system.
22 We have customers coming in the door to access
23 our services, but then our other customer is our
24 employers. We're trying to bridge that gap with
25 them.

1 We usually serve and work with anywhere
2 close to 3,000 employers annually in placing
3 individuals into employment. So we're trying to
4 strengthen that and make sure that as we are
5 recovering in the economy that we're supporting
6 employers with initiatives, WOIT tax credits,
7 on-the-job training, making sure that they have
8 talent from individuals that have disabilities,
9 and also potentially to retain current employees
10 that they currently have that they want to
11 retain. And we consult on several cases with
12 that.

13 And then finally, to try to create some
14 consistency with our pre-employment transition
15 services. As you know, with the reauthorization
16 of WIOA, we -- we are serving students from 14 to
17 21 years of age. So we -- even with the MOU and
18 working with the LEAs across the State, we are
19 continuing to expand that program, even more so
20 to touch more students, attend IPE meetings, to
21 work with the school districts and create
22 work-based learning experiences for those
23 students so that they're successful as they
24 transition from -- to post-secondary education or
25 employment.

1 So I'm going to pause right there and
2 yield the floor.

3 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you so
4 much, Shannon.

5 with that, we'll turn it over to the
6 Cambria County Association for the Blind and
7 Handicapped, John and Ken.

8 MR. STAHL: Good morning. We have some
9 handouts if anybody would like a copy of the
10 testimony.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: I just want
12 to make a comment. If you pull that closer --
13 our closed captioning online is actually
14 dependent on this feed. So the closer you make
15 it, the better.

16 Thank you.

17 MR. STAHL: We have handouts, brochures,
18 and a copy of our testimony. If anyone would
19 like that at this point or after the session,
20 you're welcome to that.

21 The Cambria County Association for the
22 Blind and Handicapped -- and I will hereby refer
23 to us as CCABH -- we're pleased to testify before
24 the House Labor and Industry Committee, the
25 Subcommittee on Employment and Unemployment and

1 we appreciate and thank you for the invitation to
2 share our thoughts and our concerns regarding an
3 overview of our services for individuals with a
4 variety of disabilities and then importantly, the
5 challenges that we are facing.

6 My name is John Stahl. I am the Director
7 of Rehabilitation at CCABH. I have approximately
8 45 years of experience with our agency. And I'm
9 here with my colleague, Ken Biter, the Senior
10 Assistant Director of Rehabilitation, who has
11 been with our company approximately 10 years.

12 Some background information regarding
13 CCABH. We are a private nonprofit corporation
14 whose mission is to develop and support an
15 environment for persons with a variety of
16 disabilities, which promotes vocational and
17 employment training, independence, and community
18 involvement through rehabilitative, recreation
19 and low-vision services, and also education for
20 the prevention of blindness.

21 CCABH unites vocational training and a
22 manufacturing business process in which we
23 produce quality products that offer employment
24 for persons with disabilities while ensuring
25 worldwide customer satisfaction. Our

1 organization employs approximately 385 total
2 individuals working at two sites in Cambria
3 County, which are both state of the art
4 manufacturing sites. Since 2017, both sites have
5 been approved as Competitive Integrated
6 Employment work Centers by the Office of
7 Vocational Rehabilitation.

8 A few of the employment opportunities in
9 our manufacturing settings include: assembly,
10 metals bending and fabricating, welding, sorting,
11 solar cabling systems that we manufacture, sewing
12 machine operators, trimming, janitorial, and
13 material handling. CCABH is a prime manufacturer
14 of sewn products that are produced for the
15 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, such as Class 2 and
16 Class 3 Safety Vests, as well as chaps, pants,
17 leggings, arm-leg bands, and sweatshirts. In
18 cooperation with the State unique source agency,
19 we also produce protective/reflective bags,
20 covers, we sew industrial mops heads, produce
21 patient gowns, clothing protectors, terry cloth
22 robes, laundry bags, and pajamas.

23 CCABH has diversified and developed and
24 manufactured its own product line of high-quality
25 hooks and hangers that are used in the mining

1 industry to carry electrical and communication
2 wires. These hangers and hooks are used in
3 mines, utilities, and shipyards nationwide and
4 are shipped internationally to over 38 foreign
5 countries.

6 More recently, CCABH has designed,
7 engineered, and manufactured a patented custom
8 cabling manufacture -- or management system,
9 excuse me, for the solar industry, which provides
10 a safe, strong, and durable support for all types
11 of wiring in utility scale, ground-mount, and
12 solar power plants. CCABH offers training,
13 supervision, and job modifications at our sites
14 to ensure individuals with disabilities can
15 productively work in our work centers.

16 In the past, CCABH has received ongoing
17 referrals from the Office of Vocational
18 Rehabilitation, OVR, and the Bureau of Blindness
19 and Visual Service, BBVS. In 2015, CCABH stopped
20 receiving referrals from those agencies. Our
21 organization inquired about the cessation of
22 referrals, and we were told by representatives of
23 these agencies that OVR and BBVS could no longer
24 refer individuals to our sites as we were deemed,
25 at that time, as not being a Competitive

1 Integrated Employment opportunity.

2 We continued to operate and seek out
3 individuals with disabilities within our
4 community without the support of OVR and BBVS
5 referrals. In 2017, we formally requested an
6 on-site review by OVR and BBVS to deem our
7 organization a Competitive Integrated Employment
8 setting in hopes of reestablishing the referrals
9 of disabled individuals for employment to our
10 organization.

11 Some of the challenges and concerns that
12 I'd like to speak on. On December 15, 2017, we
13 had an initial CIE on-site review. The CCABH
14 facilities were, in fact, deemed as a CIE
15 setting. This was conducted by the BBVS Bureau
16 Director, local BBVS District Administrator and
17 Assistant District Administrator, the OVR Western
18 Business Services and Outreach Specialist, and
19 also CCABH Staff.

20 The on-site review at that time included
21 meeting with CCABH Staff, tour of the sites,
22 review of job descriptions, and observation of
23 individuals performing the job duties. It was
24 determined at that time that our positions and
25 job descriptions met the definition of CIE. And

1 then, we expected to then start getting referrals
2 from OVR and BBVS.

3 In addition, we also had a meeting at
4 that time with the Johnstown OVR Office, the OVR
5 District Manager, and an OVR Supervisor to
6 discuss our newly-acquired CIE status. We
7 continued to provide BBVS additional job
8 descriptions to our CIE jobs. Since 2015, and
9 since -- let me repeat, since 2015, CCABH has
10 only received one referral in that time from OVR,
11 BBVS. This is one individual in six years.

12 Since the initial on-site review and
13 other subsequent visits by OVR and BBVS staff, we
14 have been continued to be told that they will
15 notify the OVR Supervisors and the Vocational
16 Counselors of our CIE status. In 2020, our
17 organization was approached by the Johnstown
18 Regional Area Industries, known as JARI, to
19 potentially partner with the Hiram G. Andrews
20 Center, HGA, in Johnstown.

21 JARI facilitated a dialogue hoping to
22 assist with employment opportunities at our sites
23 for HGA students in need of a job. Our
24 understanding, there had been conversation at
25 that time between JARI and HGA, and that was one

1 of the issues or concerns that HGA was asking
2 JARI for assistance. CCABH's follow-up e-mail to
3 two representatives at HGA, along with an e-mail
4 from JARI fell on deaf ears, no response.

5 As an organization, we've continued to
6 grow since 2015. We've persevered in filling
7 open positions. To date, since that time, we've
8 filled approximately 100 new positions at our
9 sites. We have filled these positions with
10 referrals from temporary job service companies,
11 by word-of-mouth self-referrals from our current
12 employees to friends looking for work and also
13 advertising.

14 These positions have been filled by both
15 disabled and non-disabled employees. Currently,
16 we do not receive any type of funding for
17 approximately 250 individuals at our company.
18 Plainly, I can just basically say we continue to
19 be very discouraged and frustrated with the lack
20 of any referrals from OVR, BBVS, and HGA. We're
21 essentially in the same business. We're trying
22 to provide employment opportunities for
23 individuals with disabilities.

24 In fact, a lot of phone calls occur
25 during the week of individuals seeking

1 employment. And when I get a self-referral for
2 our disabled employment, the individuals disclose
3 that they have a disability, one of the questions
4 I ask them are are you a current or past customer
5 of OVR?

6 Individuals have disclosed to use that
7 they either have or are a customer of OVR.
8 However, when they seek information from their
9 counselor for assistance, they've been told, we
10 do not send people to CCABH. So the word is not
11 getting out there.

12 Interestingly though, recently we've had
13 three site visits within the last few weeks from
14 OVR and BBVS to both of our sites. Upon
15 notification of the request for our organization
16 to participate in this hearing, we have to
17 wonder, is this coincidental or why after all of
18 these years are they suddenly interested in us?

19 During these tours, representatives
20 stressed to CCABH that there's been an ongoing
21 communication problem in OVR that counselors
22 would be allowed to refer a customer for a CIE
23 job at CCABH. In addition, it was quite
24 frequently stated that the counselors have either
25 not been told of our CIE status or they simply

1 have a preconceived opinion about our work
2 centers and they have not taken the time to tour
3 with us or even call us and view the many
4 potential job opportunities we have for
5 individuals with disabilities.

6 In closing, our organization will
7 continue to recruit and hire individuals with
8 disabilities with or without the assistance of
9 OVR and BBVS. Our mission is to employ and offer
10 as many individuals a possibility to work within
11 our community. We will continue to think outside
12 the box as we have in the last six years the best
13 avenues to reach these individuals. We do want
14 to assist them with their employment choices, and
15 we're just not really being considered as an
16 employment choice.

17 Thank you for this opportunity to testify
18 this morning and hear our concerns and
19 frustrations. We sincerely hope the honest
20 dialogue today at this hearing will benefit those
21 individuals with disabilities looking for
22 employment opportunities within the Commonwealth
23 of Pennsylvania.

24 And I'll just conclude by saying we would
25 like to be invited back to a similar hearing, if

1 we could, a year from now. And I would like to
2 Report that the results of this hearing were
3 successful and that we can renew a revived
4 partnership with OVR and BBVS with common mission
5 of employing people with disabilities.

6 Thank you.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: John, thank
8 you very much for your testimony.

9 Ken, do you have anything to add?

10 Thank you.

11 All right. With that then, I will turn
12 it over to Pennsylvania Statewide Independent
13 Living Council staffer here, Jeff Iseman, who is
14 the Public Policy and Outreach Coordinator.

15 You can start at any time. And again,
16 please make sure the microphone is up close for
17 the closed captioning.

18 Thank you.

19 MR. ISEMAN: Thank you. Good morning.

20 My name is Jeff Iseman, and I'm the
21 Public Policy and Outreach Coordinator for the
22 Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council
23 or PA SILC. A number of you are familiar with
24 us, through either me or my boss, our Executive
25 Director Matt Sealy, or visits from Independent

1 Living during budget times and others through
2 participating in OVR's quarterly board meetings,
3 the Rehab Council, and other such endeavors.

4 Every state, and our six U.S.
5 Territories, under the Federal Rehabilitation Act
6 of 1973 as amended, and more recently the
7 Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act of 2014,
8 2016 regulations have SILCs. SILC's mission is
9 to use our collective power and legal mandate to
10 develop and secure public policies that ensure
11 civil rights and expand options for all people
12 with disabilities in every aspect of life. We do
13 this through execution of our State Plan for
14 Independent Living, also referred to as our SPIL,
15 S-P-I-L. And that's based on comments we get
16 from holding public forums every three years, or
17 as needed, across Pennsylvania, and that guides
18 our focus.

19 Pennsylvania SILC partners with the 17
20 Centers for Independent Living, or CILs, C-I-Ls,
21 as needed, and other disability organizations and
22 public entities to empower people with
23 disabilities to live, work, and play in our
24 communities. Disability employment is one of our
25 priorities.

1 As mentioned earlier, we participate in a
2 number of statewide meetings, like with OVR,
3 Rehab Council, also the -- we participate
4 nationally with the National Council for
5 Independent Living, N-C-I-L, NCIL. And they have
6 an Employment and Social Security subcommittee.
7 And systems advocacy is one of the core functions
8 of SILC's.

9 In terms of funding, we partner with
10 OVR. They serve as what's called a Designated
11 State Entity, or DSE. And every SILC has to go
12 through a DSE. It's a federal requirement for
13 our funding. Ninety percent of our funding is
14 federal. It comes from the Federal Health and
15 Human Services Administration on Community
16 Living, often referred to as ACL. And ten
17 percent of that is a State match from OVR.

18 So in that -- and we appreciate the
19 assistance we've gotten from members of the
20 General Assembly in the past to help get our
21 funds in a timely manner from OVR. And sometimes
22 we've also had issues with the Comptroller.
23 Those funds have to go through that way. And
24 we've appreciated the assistance, but
25 unfortunately, we still continue to experience

1 these challenges.

2 So I mentioned a little bit about
3 Centers for Independent Living. We have a strong
4 network in rural, urban, and suburban communities
5 in Pennsylvania. In terms of our disability
6 statistics, at least 1.7 million out of 13.1
7 million Pennsylvanians have a disability. So
8 we're looking at about 15 percent of our
9 population that has a disability.

10 In terms of our CIL network, About
11 half are State-funded through a Labor and
12 Industry line item. The other half are federally
13 through the Administration on Community Living.
14 We actually have one that receives both federal
15 and State funding. And basically, in terms of
16 State -- we've had issues -- or CILs have had
17 issues with State funding, similar to what we
18 have.

19 And compared to working with other
20 entities in State government or private sector
21 organizations, it's been a challenge. The
22 paperwork and some of the -- it seems to be more
23 rigorous in terms of getting funding through OVR,
24 as the other organization here mentioned. So we
25 also have the issue of just in terms of like a

1 lot of organizations, just the funding.

2 Going back to between 2008 and 2012, we
3 wound up getting State budget cuts during the
4 recession. The last increase the CILs got was in
5 2019, two percent. In addition, there's also
6 what's called basically an administration
7 services fee, which has been in effect since the
8 2012 state budget, where it ranges from two to
9 four percent. CILs don't see the full item
10 funded. Basically, it's the item minus the two
11 percent. It goes for administrative costs for
12 staffing the grants.

13 So there is a solution our network
14 recommends to address this, and it's HB 87, which
15 Dan Miller, who's been on this Committee in the
16 past, from Allegheny County is the sponsor. We
17 think our -- the base funding for CILs was
18 enacted in Act 139 of 1994. How many of you can
19 say you're using the same level of funding since
20 1994? Let's be honest.

21 In terms of disability employment, with
22 CILs locally, we work with OVR district offices.
23 We work with local social security offices on
24 Ticket to Work. Some of you are familiar with
25 that. And we do agree that one size doesn't fit

1 all. Different people have different needs and
2 interests. So that's really important. CILs
3 also work with the Department of Human Services.
4 We have some folks that are in the Office of Long
5 Term Living that get those services, so you get
6 through those waivers.

7 We have some that work with ODP, Office
8 of Developmental Programs, through the waivers,
9 where the waivers have employment as a service
10 and they subcontract there. We submitted some
11 questions. And I think Shannon has addressed a
12 number of those questions. There may be others
13 that your members want to ask here or maybe at a
14 follow-up meeting afterwards.

15 Again, thank you for the time. And I'll
16 be here for the duration if you have any
17 questions. Thank you again.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you so
19 much for your testimony. And thanks to the panel
20 for your honest and frank words. That's why
21 we're here. We need to have a frank and honest
22 conversation about how we are providing services
23 to those with disabilities across the
24 Commonwealth.

25 So with that, I am going to see if there

1 are any questions for our panel.

2 MR. ISEMAN: Thank you.

3 MINORITY CHAIRMAN DELLOSO: I don't know
4 if it's startling testimony. It's certainly
5 disturbing that there doesn't seem to be a
6 work-together type attitude. So what is the
7 genesis of that?

8 I mean, when CCABH is looking for
9 candidates, and they can't get candidates from
10 our State agencies? What is the genesis of that?
11 How does that happen?

12 MR. STAHL: The only thing I can say in
13 response to that is we've continued the lines of
14 communication, whether it be phone calls, tours,
15 e-mails. The immediate response at those
16 person-to-person meetings or phone calls, we get
17 patted on the back. You're doing a great job.
18 This is a great opportunity. We will get the
19 word out. So there's an initial elation of maybe
20 we've finally got over that mountain and it will
21 occur, but it just drops at that point.

22 To be blunt about it, short of us going
23 and having a sit-in or whatever at the Johnstown
24 District Office or Altoona District Office or
25 storming Harrisburg or whatever, we've maintained

1 a professional, courteous attitude towards this.
2 And if my statements today were blunt, it was
3 only to show the urgency and I think the
4 discouragement that we're experiencing at this
5 point.

6 So I don't think it's a lack of anything.
7 And not to place blame, but somebody can inform
8 us if we're doing something, or need to do
9 something in addition to what we've had done to
10 facilitate getting individuals from OVR. And I
11 just wanted to clarify. We're not asking for any
12 type of funding from OVR. We're asking for
13 employment-ready individuals who have either been
14 trained or are customers of OVR that are ready to
15 join the workforce.

16 So you know, we're not looking to go
17 through or jump through any hoops or rings or OVR
18 saying it's going to take this amount of time to
19 qualify you for some type of funding. We're not
20 looking for that. We're just looking for
21 individuals to be referred. And I think perhaps
22 in the testimony -- I'm not sure if it was Jeff
23 or whatever -- we're not all things for all
24 people. But what we're saying is, we're a good
25 opportunity that I think is falling through the

1 cracks and it's just another tool in the tool bag
2 for OVR, I think, to give their customers a
3 look-see, an opportunity to say, hey, I don't
4 know if this would be a good fit for you, if you
5 would be interested in this, but we have a
6 CIE-certified site in Johnstown and Ebensburg in
7 Cambria County, the sites where you could come
8 and do a tour.

9 And as I tell people -- I'm not a used
10 cars salesman. I don't get commissions if we
11 hire somebody or that, but we just are looking
12 desperately to complete our mission of trying to
13 offer as many people with disabilities the
14 opportunity to work. And a lot of people will
15 come in and say, I never heard about this. I
16 went to the temp agency and they said you might
17 be interested in this.

18 So we're just asking for maybe a renewal
19 of the relationship with OVR and that maybe
20 Shannon can facilitate that the from your level
21 and your seat down through the district office to
22 help us with the common mission.

23 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Turn your
24 microphone on, Shannon.

25 MS. AUSTIN: We do have a new director

1 over BVBS, in particular. So we have six
2 locations, of course, that are co-located with
3 that. I would love to see you guys talk that
4 through and connect with Rod Acedonis [phonetic]
5 concerning that.

6 The other thing is that within OVR, when
7 we're required to do our service delivery model,
8 no matter who you are coming through our system,
9 we're required to do options. So with that being
10 said, no matter what service that is, when it
11 comes to, you know, assessments, when it comes to
12 training programs, when it comes to job
13 opportunities, we're required to give options.

14 So with that in mind, if we have someone
15 that has a set goal -- we also have to set goals
16 when someone comes through our system. We set
17 those goals. And based on those goals, we begin
18 to give instructions in where they can
19 potentially go to work. And with that being the
20 case, depending on the employment goal, we're
21 required to give at least three options or more
22 on where they may want to be placed.

23 So with that process that we have, that
24 is not not through OVR, that is through RSA and
25 how we do our funding. So anyone and everyone,

1 our job here is to get people to work. We work
2 with several facilities that offer, you know,
3 competitive integrated employment opportunities.
4 We've certified, just like we did in the past,
5 but I would -- this is the first time I'm hearing
6 from you. And I've been in this role for two and
7 a half years.

8 So I would love to connect with you, with
9 Rod. But do understand, we're working with many
10 service providers, hundreds across the
11 Commonwealth, in looking at employment
12 opportunities. We are working -- we have to give
13 our consumers options when they come through our
14 door. No matter what the relationship outside,
15 you know, of OVR, we have to make sure, whatever
16 that goal is, that we're giving them options on
17 where they're going to work, where they want to
18 work, see if it's a good fit for them based on
19 their disability, any impediment to employment.
20 And we work through that with the consumers that
21 we work with, so --

22 MR. STAHL: Could I just respond to that
23 also?

24 And that's all we're really asking is
25 that we're considered to be an option. And we

1 have a number of individuals who we've learned,
2 either directly or indirectly, that have been
3 past OVR customers and their case has been closed
4 maybe due to lack of success, maybe their
5 employment goals were not able to be met where
6 they would like to work, and we're just saying,
7 maybe as a back-door option, anything there, just
8 to say we know you want to be a jewelry repair
9 person, but there's not a whole lot of jobs in
10 the Cambria County area for that and you were
11 trained for that. would you consider broadening
12 your horizons a little bit?

13 And it doesn't have to be your lifetime
14 job, but if you're looking for employment, you
15 want to make money -- we pay benefits. Our
16 individuals gets pension plan, hospitalization,
17 holidays, vacation, sick leave. So it's the full
18 gamut there. And like I said, I think the thrust
19 of our testimony is that we just want this as an
20 option to the individual. And it might be to be
21 used as a stepping stone if they haven't had any
22 good work experience before for on a resumé.

23 An employer right now, even with
24 unemployment being the way it is within the State
25 of Pennsylvania, the majority of employers in the

1 State of Pennsylvania are not rehabilitation
2 providers. They want a person who is absolutely
3 work-ready and has the soft skills that are
4 necessary to be employed. You can have the
5 particular training, but if you haven't had the
6 opportunity for any other type of work on a
7 resumé, an employer may not want to continue your
8 employment if you make some mistakes. We're also
9 in the rehabilitation business, so a person can
10 make those mistakes, learn and be trained in not
11 only the job skills, but the soft skills that are
12 necessary.

13 We -- we just absolutely enjoy to see a
14 person who's come to us, developed skills and
15 abilities and maybe improved their confidence and
16 move on somewhere else. That is fantastic. That
17 is win-win. We have a couple personal stories
18 like that that we've provided training to
19 individuals with CAD training, other things like
20 that, operating robotic machines to do different
21 types of work. And our individuals are very
22 prod.

23 But all I'm really asking is give us an
24 opportunity to show this to your customers,
25 people with -- individuals with disabilities to

1 give them the option. They may want to take that
2 option; they may not want to. But right now,
3 they're not given that option to even see or be
4 aware of it.

5 Thank you.

6 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you
7 very much.

8 And I echo the concerns of my colleague,
9 Chairman Delloso. I do hope that out of this,
10 again, it's bringing everyone to the table so we
11 can have these honest discussions about, you
12 know, what programs are out there, is the
13 Department working with these programs and how
14 can there be better communication between our
15 service providers across the state, those that
16 are, you know, where the rubber meets the road
17 matching those individuals with disabilities with
18 those employers or being their employer, and the
19 Department. So again, it's great for you guys to
20 be here so we can have these conversations.

21 I'm informed that Representative
22 Mizgorski, who has joined us online, has a
23 question.

24 Representative Mizgorski, you're in
25 order.

1 REPRESENTATIVE MIZGORSKI: Thank you,
2 Madam Chair.

3 And thank you to everyone for taking the
4 time to testify today. This question touches
5 everyone across the board. And it is really how
6 has the pandemic affected your providing of
7 services?

8 What services have been more in demand?
9 Which ones may have been less?

10 How have you handled this?

11 Has the pandemic brought forth new
12 challenges that you didn't have before, or did it
13 just sort of make previous issues larger?

14 Just what is the overall situation of how
15 the pandemic has affected services?

16 Thank you.

17 MR. BITER: Hello.

18 So the COVID pandemic initially did
19 require us to lay off some of our employees due
20 to the State. ODP required us to lay off
21 probably two-thirds of our workforce because they
22 are funded by ODP. Our work was deemed essential
23 because of the work that we produce, the products
24 that we produce for the energy sector. So we did
25 not close. We remained open.

1 As soon as we were able to bring those --
2 excuse me -- those individuals back, they were
3 back to work. Since about January of this year,
4 we have had everyone return to work. Some of the
5 interesting and some of the obstacles, things
6 that we've had is with the social distancing and
7 the masking, things like that. However, our
8 employees have been very excited to get back to
9 work.

10 They would drive by whenever the State
11 had forced us to lay them off and they would say,
12 hey, we see vehicles in the parking lot. Why
13 aren't we back to work yet? So our people wanted
14 to come back to work, and we were eager to have
15 them come back to work. Maybe the regular
16 workforce you might not see that, but our people
17 love to work. So that was some of the -- some of
18 the obstacles and the struggles, but we have
19 continued to serve our customers and produce our
20 products and to keep those customers happy and
21 those products going out the door.

22 So we haven't seen a huge obstacle, maybe
23 some hiccups, but we have our people right back
24 to work.

25 MS. AUSTIN: With OVR, we have similar,

1 some of the same experiences that we are -- that
2 we had to push through because of the pandemic.
3 Of course we've had staffing issues too with the
4 pandemic. We've had probably about 80-plus
5 employees go through requirement or through
6 promotion. So that -- and we were on a hiring
7 freeze, so that was an issue.

8 And dealing with our providers, in
9 particular, some of them had to lay off
10 individuals or some did not recover because of
11 the economic issues of the pandemic where they
12 just weren't either essential or they could not
13 sustain themselves during the pandemic, or they
14 had to lessen their staff and laid off
15 individuals. So that meant for OVR that where we
16 had agreements with various providers, we weren't
17 able to, you know, give referrals to them or work
18 with them because they just did not have the
19 staff in order to work with them.

20 Unlike DHS, who was able to give
21 providers a retainer, according to our grant, we
22 do not have the ability to do that. It's more of
23 a reimbursement grant. So they have to implement
24 services, then we do services. We also -- I
25 think there's been a huge discussion when it

1 comes to the technological divide, especially
2 with individuals with disabilities in particular,
3 where they don't have the technology. So as much
4 as we are in this virtual space and teleworking,
5 we have to be somewhere in the middle, where
6 we're able to offer some of that, but also face
7 to face.

8 Technologically, if consumers don't have
9 it, you know, we have to work with them where
10 they're at -- we also -- every platform is not
11 accessible. There's accessibility issues with
12 some of the platforms for a lot of our customers.
13 So we've been really fighting, you know, to try
14 to procure the things that we need and making
15 sure that we're engaging with customers where
16 they can have the best customer service.

17 The other thing that we have that we have
18 seen, our referrals have dropped. Some of it is
19 because of the pandemic. Some of the individuals
20 that we work with have secondary health issues,
21 so they chose to kind of opt themselves out, or
22 their family is like, you know, we're not going
23 to engage. We're going to pause with employment
24 because it was health and safety first. And that
25 includes those that were in 14C facilities, that

1 are mostly significantly disabled, but also, you
2 know, those that had current cases. They kind of
3 pauses with services or they just, you know, I
4 don't want services at this time.

5 So we've seen referrals drop. We've also
6 seen open cases, you know, where they just pause,
7 they weren't ready. And some of them are
8 starting to, with it opening up more and people
9 are, you know, vaccinated, we're seeing more
10 people wanting to access services and begin to
11 look for work again.

12 I think the harvest is plentiful for
13 those that want to work. We have an abundance of
14 employers at this point where wages are rising.
15 We see that we're having more employers outreach
16 to the Agency for opportunities for employment
17 because there is a shortage of those going into
18 various things. And there's at-home
19 opportunities where people can telework from
20 home. And for those that were -- transportation
21 was a huge issue, that's one of the top three
22 things for individuals with disabilities and
23 getting to jobs. They have an option to work
24 from home, where that option may not have been
25 available, especially in rural areas, where

1 there's limited transportation in order for them
2 to get to and from work.

3 So those are just a few of the things
4 that we've seen, you know, with the Agency.

5 MR. ISEMAN: I think something else that
6 has compounded is just the order section of the
7 OVR waiting list, which has been -- I believe
8 it's been reopened, I think, effective July 1 of
9 this year. So you've had that as well as COVID.
10 We hear mixed things. Some district offices,
11 it's like we're going forward. Others seem to
12 still be on pause.

13 Just to echo a comment that was made
14 earlier, we have some Centers for Independent
15 Living that work well with the OVR district
16 offices. We've also heard some comments where
17 they're doing what the Cambria County
18 organization is seeing. They're looking at
19 private employers or temp agencies to try to get
20 some of the populations that they serve employed.

21 For the record, we are -- we're
22 supportive of getting rid of 14C in terms of just
23 more competitive, integrated employment. So it's
24 -- and COVID has made that a challenge. There's
25 no question. You know, I think all the models,

1 everything that was talked about, we need to
2 continue to look at doing different models.
3 We're willing to work with OVR and with others to
4 do that on any level.

5 Thank you.

6 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you.

7 A quick follow-up to that, Ms. Austin.
8 You were talking about that technical divide for
9 those with disabilities during the pandemic and
10 that as we see increase with telework, there are
11 still some challenges with that with different
12 platforms maybe not being as accessible. I know
13 you said that the Department was looking at
14 on-boarding Zoom as an option.

15 So what platforms out there are the best,
16 the gold standard, if you will, for those with
17 disabilities so that, you know, those listening
18 at home know, you know, what options are out
19 there. And what have you guys seen for
20 businesses and employers if they're looking at
21 integrating technology and encouraging those to
22 work from home, which ones are the best for those
23 with disabilities?

24 MS. AUSTIN: I think it really depends
25 probably on the disability, you know, that they

1 may have. We have seen that Teams has been very
2 successful with working with individuals that are
3 deaf and hard of hearing and that are blind and
4 have vision impairment because of the
5 accessibility things being baked into the system.
6 So a lot of our board meetings, we have those
7 type of things, especially since it's open to the
8 public.

9 Teams could be beneficial to utilize.
10 DocuSign, we've heard that has raised to the top.
11 Sales Force has raised to the top. When I hear
12 and engage with other stakeholders on -- those
13 are very accessible platforms for individuals to
14 use.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you.
16 Good information to know.

17 I know we had hit on the wait list for
18 services. So where are we, you know, with wait
19 lists?

20 Are there current wait lists? If so, for
21 what services?

22 So Ms. Austin, if you could talk about
23 that.

24 Thank you.

25 MS. AUSTIN: So as you guys know, on July

1 2019, the order was closed, so we had a waiting
2 list at that time. As of July 1 of 2021, we have
3 no waiting list. We were able to open up the
4 order. So if people are applying, they're
5 directly -- you know, they're going to the
6 district office requesting services, they're
7 either going online, they're doing it through the
8 phone, doing a pre-application, or they're being
9 connected to a counselor right away.

10 So there is no waiting list. We are
11 serving currently those most significantly
12 disabled at this time. And then bimonthly we're
13 assessing if we can work with SD and NSD
14 customers that may be on the list, so that we can
15 take -- and historically, we have never really
16 worked with those populations, but because of
17 where our referrals are, we want to make sure
18 that we're serving those individuals during this
19 time.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: And then for
21 those here, how does that order then impact your
22 delivery of services, if you could talk about
23 that?

24 MS. AUSTIN: while it was closed or while
25 it was open?

1 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Both. You
2 know, before and after.

3 So are things better now? How is that
4 impacting your service delivery?

5 MR. BITER: Well, as John has said in our
6 testimony, we haven't received -- we've only
7 received one referral since 2015. So that's
8 prior to the close of the order of selection, and
9 then we've received one since.

10 So can't really speak to that.

11 MR. ISEMAN: Yeah, I still think it's
12 slow for the Independent Livings that we work
13 with and our disability organizations, between
14 the pandemic and the order of selection. So I
15 think there's still a lot of work to -- work to
16 be done there, so -- thanks.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: So with the
18 pandemic, have there been services that are more
19 sought after? You know, has -- it sounds like
20 things have changed a little bit, but what --
21 coming out of the pandemic, where are we?

22 You know, what are those services that
23 are needed now? Maybe 2019 things were
24 different. It's 2021, and what do you foresee in
25 the future or where we are going, so that we can

1 properly adapt?

2 MS. AUSTIN: So one of the things that we
3 have -- one of our priorities that we are going
4 to be focussing on as an Agency is our referrals
5 period. When I look at the tracking of our
6 referrals over the last four years, you know,
7 prior to the pandemic, prior to the order
8 selection, we see that our referrals are half of
9 where they were prior within the Agency and with
10 new applications that are coming into the system.

11 So we are -- we are really working on
12 implementing a strategy to increase and get more
13 robust referrals for the Agency, so they can
14 access services. We also are going to doing a
15 campaign to say, hey, we're here. We want to
16 work with you to really kind of support
17 transitioning individuals into those potential
18 jobs where we can bridge the gap with on-the-job
19 training for employers since they're another
20 customer within the Agency.

21 When I think about the referrals -- when
22 I think about -- so a couple of things. During
23 the pandemic, we did see a pause in some of the
24 services. So we did -- prior to that, we did not
25 allow for virtual services. But during that

1 time, starting in like March or April, we started
2 allowing for virtual services, where historically
3 we had not done that. Everything was done
4 face-to-face. There was some lag time with
5 anything that was community-based because a lot
6 of employers during that time were not allowing
7 extra people with all the safe distancing, with
8 all the mitigation measures that were in place
9 for their places of employment. So they weren't
10 bringing anyone extra into the place.

11 I think some of that, because it's being
12 lifted and they're trying to get back to somewhat
13 normal, you know, they're allowing people to go
14 on site. It also impacted our youth, where they
15 were getting work-based learning experience, job
16 shadowing experiences. There was a lag in that
17 because they definitely was not trying to bring a
18 youth on site with no work history.

19 So some of those are starting to come
20 back. And we're able -- we were able to
21 implement provider agreements with some of the
22 programs to give the young people experiences
23 that they needed to get them ready for, you know,
24 potential jobs. Some of the services that we see
25 increasing within the Agency is going to be

1 training. I -- I think there's going to be an
2 emergence of really apprenticeships.

3 We have identified within OVR that this
4 is going to be an area that we're going to spend
5 some time. And we have some staff in our
6 business services that are being trained to
7 create apprenticeships for individuals with
8 disabilities as an option. Historically, we have
9 paid for training, which is good, but virtual is
10 not the best platform for some of our folks.
11 They need hands-on.

12 So we're trying to create an environment
13 where they can do more hands-on and develop more
14 employer partnerships so that they can get trial
15 work periods and get on-the-job training in order
16 to get on-boarded with the employer.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: So with that,
18 what are you doing within OVR to sell yourselves,
19 sell the services to these employers?

20 Are you partnering with organizations
21 like the NFIB, the Chamber, local Chambers of
22 Commerce, other, you know, Manufacturers
23 Association, to get the word out that you have
24 people who are ready, willing and able to work?

25 MS. AUSTIN: So all of the above. When

1 it comes to letting employers know, we have -- I
2 think certain areas have stronger business
3 service teams locally within their offices.
4 We're trying to make sure that we have single
5 points within all our district offices. Because
6 of the staffing shortages or because we were on a
7 hiring freeze, that was not the case. So we are
8 definitely trying to grow staff in this space.

9 we're also trying to grow our business
10 service division out of our central operations to
11 really have some plug-and-go type things that we
12 can implement across our footprint in order to
13 outreach to employers. With that said, we hire
14 specialists to do apprenticeships. We also hired
15 a specialist to do summer programming with some
16 of the youth that we're working with, but we are
17 doing a vigorous campaign internally to really
18 stretch out to employers more than ever because
19 of just the opportunities that are just -- when I
20 say we get a lot of contact from employers, I
21 cannot stress enough that we're getting a lot of
22 -- we had an initiative -- and we're doing a lot
23 of partnering. That's the other thing.

24 So like during the pandemic, you know,
25 one of the things we had the opportunity to do is

1 work with Inspire-Tech, in particular, where we
2 -- during the spring, where they had temporary
3 employment, we were able to place close to 325
4 people within a short period of time, making
5 \$15.00 an hour, which was amazing. So we're
6 finding ourselves being able to partner with
7 employers because they have telework
8 opportunities.

9 So we're just -- we're just trying to
10 keep ourselves open to, you know, all the
11 different opportunities when it comes to
12 employers.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: So with the
14 apprenticeship option, which is fantastic -- I'm
15 so happy to hear that -- you know, this summer we
16 had a number of meetings on apprenticeships and
17 ratios. Some of the concerns were that in some
18 of the non-traditional areas, those ratios are a
19 problem with the trying to, you know, bring on
20 individuals.

21 And I could foresee this happening,
22 potentially, in this space where, you know, you
23 have a number of people who would love to gain
24 employment, gain training through apprentice, but
25 potentially, because the ratios might not be able

1 to do so. So what type of areas are you looking
2 at for expanding apprenticeship programs?

3 Are these non-traditional apprentice
4 industries?

5 where are you looking at the apprentice
6 program?

7 MS. AUSTIN: So I want to step back just
8 a little bit and talk through what you just said.
9 So I think, on the front end, because of who we
10 serve and working with employers, our first
11 engagement with employers a lot of time is
12 education and awareness, disability etiquette, to
13 inform employers, you know, the various scope of
14 what disabilities are, so that they're not opting
15 people out of employment before they opt them in.

16 So like, there may be certain barriers to
17 individuals going into certain industries. That
18 is true, you know, because of health and safety.
19 But there are various disabilities that there's
20 no impact. So like, you know, a lot of it on the
21 front end, when we're working with, you know,
22 apprenticeships with the Council, we have a seat
23 at the table when we're having that conversation.
24 When we're dealing with employers, we're having
25 that conversation about, you know,

1 accommodations. We're having that about
2 disability etiquette. We're talking about having
3 a talent pool. And then we're making sure we're
4 really matching the customer with an employer
5 that makes sense, where there's success that's
6 going to take place, so there's not a chance for
7 failure to take place.

8 But a lot of what we have to do with
9 employers to make sure because of the stigma,
10 because of the perception of what people with
11 disabilities can and can't do, we really have to
12 inform employers of the abilities of individuals
13 with disabilities on the onset, you know, before
14 even the referral. And so that takes time,
15 depending on the industry. But I think as we get
16 more success, that we're going to have more
17 success, especially in the area of
18 apprenticeship.

19 What area? I think apprenticeships is
20 just wide open. I know we have a lot, but we
21 need to continue to kind of broker that
22 relationship more. This is a new space for OVR.
23 Have we sent people to apprenticeship programs
24 and supported them? Yes, we have. Some people
25 have trained and retrained in apprenticeships,

1 but we want to increase our efforts in that
2 space, knowing that everyone does not want to go
3 through, you know, post-secondary education or go
4 -- you know, they want to learn and they want to
5 get paid while they're learning.

6 So like, there's a definite audience for
7 young people that are tired of school and that
8 really want to go to work to learn a craft and
9 get paid while they're doing that. So we want to
10 make sure that that definitely is an option for
11 those individuals, young people, individuals that
12 want to transition into the apprenticeships.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you.
14 One other question about unemployment.

15 So as John and Ken were talking about, a
16 number of our folks who have disabilities who go
17 through OVR for services are unemployed. Did OVR
18 track those who are unemployed?

19 And was there a particular, you know,
20 task force within OVR to try and focus on those
21 who are unemployed to get them back into the
22 workforce?

23 What were the efforts on that front?

24 MS. AUSTIN: Can you give me a little bit
25 more detail on that? Because every -- a lot of

1 people that come there, you're not required to be
2 unemployed. You could be under employed coming
3 to the Agency for help.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: So those
5 that might have been unemployed during the
6 pandemic, was there a task force, if you will,
7 for those? Because we saw it, you know, we
8 received hundreds if not thousands of calls in
9 our individual offices for our constituents, but
10 that subset, since you have that relationship
11 with those folks, did they come back to you?

12 Did you track that? Is there a tracking
13 system within L&I, where if somebody pulls up,
14 oh, this person is unemployed, but they're also
15 an OVR client, you know, was there an ability to
16 share that information so you could better serve
17 them?

18 MS. AUSTIN: So we don't have that as a
19 tracking mechanism within Labor and Industry to
20 show that they're an OVR customer and they're
21 unemployed. But we do know that if they apply
22 for unemployment, we can -- it will disclose if
23 they have a disability. So they are looking for
24 that.

25 There were several times I worked with

1 Bill Trusky, where we're able to look at the
2 numbers. We did some level of outreach. We were
3 working across programs. But our biggest dilemma
4 that we had during the pandemic that I --
5 literally, I could do one whole hour and talk
6 about was the impact of the closed order of
7 selection. So here we are, as much as we wanted
8 to help individuals with disabilities, we had a
9 closed order, where there was a waiting list that
10 we had to get approval to remove people
11 financially from that waiting list. That was a
12 barrier for the Agency.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you.

14 Again, just checking to see if there are
15 any other questions.

16 I can continue on, but I know we have
17 another panel here. I would certainly love to
18 continue this conversation with the Department on
19 this. I think this is a very important area that
20 we need to pay some attention to.

21 Like I said in my opening remarks, we
22 have a workforce shortage here. We have plenty
23 of employers who are looking for employees. I
24 think the service providers who are here today
25 are set to deliver and place them. And I really

1 truly hope that out of this, we can have better
2 working relationships between those working
3 providers, OVR, the legislature if there are
4 areas where, you know, we can improve on the
5 legislative front. If there's a bureaucratic red
6 tape piece that we need to cut, let us know. But
7 with that, I just would certainly ask to continue
8 this conversation between John and Ken and the
9 Department and just really appreciate you guys
10 being here today.

11 with that, we're going to close this
12 particular panel. And we will begin with our
13 second panel here, which is actually going to be
14 virtual. So thank you so much for joining us
15 here today. We're going to start with our second
16 panel.

17 And we also have a couple of members who
18 have joined us online. I do believe Chairman Jim
19 Cox is with us online as well as Representative
20 John Keefer. So thank you so much for joining us
21 to those members who are joining us virtually.

22 Our second panel today comes to us from
23 the Employment First Oversight Commission.
24 They're joining us remotely today, and we have
25 two EFOC Commissioners. First, we have Dr. Josie

1 Badger, who is the president of J Badger
2 Consulting. She's also the campaign manager of
3 the I want to work Campaign through the United
4 Way of Southwestern PA.

5 And I just want to give Dr. Badger a
6 shoutout and thank her so much for her work with
7 me and Senator Mensch and Representative Dan
8 Frankel on the Mod legislation that we were able
9 to pass earlier this year.

10 Our second testifier is Steve Suroviec
11 -- I apologize if I messed up that name; I'm
12 doing my best -- who is the chair of the
13 Commission. And he is the President and CEO of
14 Achieva.

15 So thank you so much, Steve and Dr.
16 Badger, for joining us here today.

17 Dr. Badger, if you would like to start --
18 DR. BADGER: Absolutely.

19 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: -- you can go
20 right ahead.

21 DR. BADGER: Thank you all. Thank you,
22 Representative and Chairwoman Klunk, the
23 Subcommittee members and staff for allowing us to
24 speak here today on the Employment for Oversight
25 Commission, or I may refer to it as EFOC. It's a

1 little bit easier to say. And that was
2 established under the Employment First
3 Legislation, which was Act 36 of 2018. I have
4 the honor, as was mentioned, of being the
5 campaign manager of the #I want to work campaign
6 for United Way Southwestern Pennsylvania, which
7 has worked both on the Mod bill, which we are so
8 grateful for, and also on this Employment First
9 legislation.

10 In this position, I've been able to work
11 with the General Assembly on moving amazing bills
12 forward, which I think this subcommittee and this
13 hearing today is really in the spirit of the work
14 that we have been working on in the past few
15 years. And the Employment First legislation was
16 passed two years after the original Employment
17 First Executive Order of 2016-03, that was signed
18 by Governor Wolf. The Executive Order was a
19 precursor to the Act and had many of the elements
20 in is. It was establishes as a policy of the
21 Commonwealth.

22 It is grounded in a philosophy that
23 raises expectations for everyone, which makes
24 unemployment or segregated, sub-minimum wage jobs
25 the exception rather than the assumption,

1 particularly for people with disabilities. The
2 purpose of the Employment First Act is to ensure
3 that individuals with a disability be given the
4 opportunity to achieve economic independence
5 through jobs that pay competitive wages in
6 community-integrated settings.

7 So I -- we've talked about this a lot
8 before on these panels, but competitive wages
9 refers to an individual at least earning minimum
10 wage. And integrated refers to working alongside
11 people with and without disabilities in a typical
12 job in the community. The Act provides structure
13 and better oversight to increase competitive
14 employment in an integrated setting in State,
15 county, and local agencies for those individuals
16 with disabilities.

17 The Act addresses several key principles
18 of Employment First regarding access for all
19 Pennsylvanians with disabilities and insists on
20 policies which number one, includes competitive
21 integrated employment, which is the preferred
22 outcome for all Pennsylvanians with disabilities,
23 especially those receiving publicly-supported
24 services.

25 Number two, any State and county agency

1 and entities using public funds -- and that might
2 include education, training and
3 employment-related services, or long-term support
4 services, is required to make sure that
5 Employment First is effectively implemented.

6 And then three, State and county agencies
7 are to work together to ensure that resources are
8 managed and allocated effectively for the support
9 of Employment First. Further, this Act, number
10 one, requires that the State make an effort to
11 ensure that seven percent or more of its staff
12 are people with disabilities. The second, it
13 requires the Governor to issue an annual Report
14 to the legislature -- legislation and legislators
15 -- about this progress. And three, it creates
16 the Governor's Disability Cabinet.

17 As constructed, a key to the success of
18 the statute was the creation of the Pennsylvania
19 Employment First Oversight Commission, which is
20 built of executive and legislative appointees.
21 I'm one of them. Steve was one of them, but we
22 are celebrating our third year -- and so a full
23 term -- on our Commission. So we are now
24 awaiting new and renewed appointments from the
25 executive and legislative branches to fill these

1 important roles on our Commission.

2 The EFOC is charged to track the
3 measurable progress of public agencies in the
4 implementing of this Act with the full
5 cooperation of State agencies and issue an annual
6 Report on October 1 -- so we just released one --
7 of each year. This Report details the progress
8 of each of the measurable goals and objectives
9 during the preceding year and include
10 recommendations to the Governor and the General
11 Assembly for effective strategies and policies
12 that support the implementation of Employment
13 First.

14 The annual reports are the Commission's
15 effort to collect data from those agencies
16 responsible for implementing the Act. It has
17 been an ongoing process. And while data is
18 constantly being collected and analyzed to fit
19 the needs of changes that we're seeing, the
20 Commission has been able to establish various
21 measurable goals and objectives and formulate
22 recommendations to assist the State and local
23 agencies to meet the obligations under the Act.

24 So thank you all for listening to a
25 little bit of the history of the EFOC, of the

1 Act, and what we're working for.

2 Now I will turn it over to Steve Suroviec
3 to talk more about the Report.

4 Thank you.

5 MR. SUROVIEC: Thanks, Josie.

6 My name is Steve Suroviec. I'm the
7 current Chair of the Employment First Oversight
8 Commission. I want to thank chairman --
9 Chairwoman Klunk for holding this hearing this
10 morning to learn more about the Commission and
11 the Commission's annual Report, which was just
12 issued over a month ago.

13 You have my full testimony before you.
14 And what I'm going to try to do now is to try to
15 summarize the testimony in the interest of time.
16 My full testimony attempts to summarize the
17 Report that we just issued as well as highlight
18 the Report's key recommendations.

19 So as a reminder, Act 36 specifically
20 charges the Commission with issuing an annual
21 Report that, A, details the progress made on
22 measurable goals and objectives during the
23 preceding fiscal year; and B, includes
24 recommendations to the Governor and to the
25 General Assembly for effective strategies and

1 policies needed to support the implementation of
2 the Act.

3 The Commission's October 1st Report is
4 the third such Report issued by the Commission
5 since its inception. And after three years, the
6 Commission believes that the enactment of Act 36
7 of 2018 has been very positive and has succeeded
8 in generating debate and activity in areas of
9 State government that heretofore had been lacking
10 or dormant.

11 At the same time, the Commission believes
12 much more progress can be made and that the
13 potential act -- the potential of Act 36 is far
14 from being realized. The Commission's October
15 Report also drives attention to some themes or
16 trends that seem to be developing after three
17 years. First, the Commission does not have an
18 adequate sense of whether all provisions of
19 Act 36 are actually being implemented. This is
20 something the Commission will work with the
21 Governor's Office on during 2022.

22 Second, the Commission also includes in
23 the Report its sense of how certain State
24 agencies are doing in terms of implementing
25 Employment First policy as required by Act 36.

1 DHS's Office of Long Term Living, quote,
2 continues to make little to no progress as it
3 relates to people with employment outcomes for
4 people with disabilities through Community Health
5 Choices, end quote.

6 DHS's Office of Developmental Programs
7 has taken Employment First seriously and has a
8 number of things in place to increase competitive
9 integrated employment outcomes for its
10 participants. The Commission commends the Bureau
11 of Special Education Director, Carole Clancy, for
12 steps she's been taking to improve data
13 collection and her work with OVR. However,
14 what's less clear is whether those in positions
15 of leadership above the Special Education Bureau
16 within the Department of Education are taking
17 Act 36 seriously and challenging Pennsylvania's
18 500 individual school districts to do better when
19 it comes to transitioning students with
20 disabilities into jobs when they leave high
21 school.

22 The Commission also believe that the
23 Governor's Office of Administration has the
24 opportunity to make Pennsylvania's State
25 government a model employer and national leader

1 in the area of disability hiring. And while OA
2 has initiated some steps to advance disability
3 employment, the Commission believes there is much
4 more that could be done with greater sense of
5 urgency. And with respect to OVR, the Commission
6 believes OVR has employees who are competent and
7 passionate about their mission, but that the
8 Agency's complicated processes and lengthy delays
9 continue to plague OVR.

10 Moving onto measurable goals and
11 objectives. We included 11 goals and objective
12 in the Report. They're all included in my
13 written -- my written testimony. In the interest
14 of time, I will not go through all of them now.

15 In addition to the measurable goals and
16 objectives, the Commission's October Report
17 includes 25 specific recommendations to the
18 executive branch and six specific recommendations
19 to the legislature. I won't go through all the
20 25 recommendations in the interest of time, but
21 they are enumerated in my written testimony.

22 I would, however, like -- I'd like to
23 briefly walk through at least five of the
24 recommendations contained in the Report for the
25 General Assembly. And they are as follows:

1 first, the Commission recommends that a
2 legislative hearing be held on Section 4,
3 Subsection H of Act 36 to hear testimony from the
4 Governor's Office of administration, the Civil
5 Service Commission, and to learn about the
6 efforts they are making to employ people with
7 disabilities, and the actual number of employees
8 with disabilities in State government.

9 Act 36 outlines very specific things that
10 these agencies are supposed to be doing. And
11 while the Commission, you know, can highlight
12 progress, or a lack there of, in its annual
13 Report, you know, it's really the General
14 Assembly that can hold their feet to the fire to
15 make sure Act 36 is being followed.

16 Second, the Commission recommends that a
17 hearing be held to examine employment data,
18 employment service utilization, and employment
19 outcomes for working-age participants in a
20 Community Health Choices program. According to
21 data provided by OLTL, very few participants in
22 Community Health Choices are working or receiving
23 employment services. There are 53,243 working
24 age people enrolled in Community Health Choices,
25 but only 803 participants have an employment goal

1 in their individualized service plan, and only 74
2 are receiving an employment service. And in all,
3 only 266 people of the 53,000-plus working-age
4 participants in Community Health Choices have
5 competitive integrated employment, which is less
6 than a percentage -- actually, it's 0.5 percent.

7 Third, the Commission recommends that the
8 General Assembly pass a Resolution directing the
9 Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to study
10 and report on the return on investment of OVR's
11 Hiram G. Andrews Center. Approximately \$23
12 million is directed from OVR's budget to fund
13 this 24/7 campus operation.

14 OVR's per customer cost for HGAC is
15 significantly higher than its traditional
16 customers, yet it's unclear what value graduates
17 of HGAC are getting as compared to non-HGAC
18 customers of OVR or those OVR customers who
19 attend traditional post-secondary education
20 programs. The review should consider whether the
21 \$23 million could be effectively redirected to
22 traditional OVR services or regional or county
23 career technical programs or community colleges
24 where individuals with disabilities could learn
25 alongside other students without disabilities.

1 Fourth, the Commission urges the General
2 Assembly to pass legislation that would require
3 each school district to have a full-time,
4 dedicated and highly qualified transition
5 coordinator. Currently, transition coordinators
6 usually have other full-time duties and cannot
7 dedicate the time and effort into the transition
8 coordinator job that it requires and that
9 students with disabilities deserve.

10 And fifth, the Commission recommends that
11 Act 36, or the recent Civil Service Reform Act,
12 be amended to make it easier for qualified
13 applicants with disability to be hired by State
14 government agencies. There were specific ideas
15 outlined in the Report, including creating
16 something similar to the Federal government's
17 Schedule A process and creating a customized
18 employment job classification.

19 On behalf of the members of the
20 Employment First Oversight Commission, I want to
21 thank the subcommittee for holding this hearing
22 and shining a light on the Employment First
23 policy and the work of the Commission.

24 This concludes the summary of my written
25 testimony.

1 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you,
2 Steve and Josie, for your testimony and the
3 summation of this Report.

4 I have to say, when I was going through
5 the Report, there were a lot of things that I was
6 excited about, but also some things that made me
7 quite concerned.

8 And one of those, Steve, you highlighted
9 in one of your recommendations to us as policy
10 makers here in Harrisburg to hold a hearing on
11 the Community Health Choices Program and the
12 Office of Long Term Living. Those numbers are
13 startling when you look at them -- that there are
14 53,248 working-age people enrolled in Community
15 Health Choices, but only 803 participants have an
16 employment goal. And then, only 74 are actually
17 receiving an employment service. So then only
18 266 of those 53,000 working-age participants have
19 a competitive integrated employment opportunity,
20 which is only .5 percent.

21 This is so incredibly startling when we
22 know that out of those 53,000 people there are so
23 many people within that category who could be
24 taking advantage of the opportunity to have an
25 employment goal in their individualized service

1 plan. So I think that that is certainly
2 something we need to hold our feet, you know, the
3 feet to the fire with Community Health Choices
4 and those programs to see what is going on there
5 and where are those gaps.

6 That is certainly something that we need
7 to take a look at. So thank you so very much for
8 bringing that to our attention.

9 with that, I know that there are
10 questions. And I will turn it over to Chairman
11 Delloso.

12 MINORITY CHAIRMAN Delloso: I just --
13 Mr. Suroviec, in reading your testimony, past
14 legislation that requires each school district to
15 have a full-time, dedicated and highly qualified
16 and/or credentialed transition coordinator.

17 What is the -- how is that currently
18 handled in most of our school districts, the
19 transition coordinator position?

20 MR. SUROVIEC: And again, I'll be
21 speaking on behalf of the Commission and I'll do
22 my best to answer some of the technical
23 questions. If we can't -- if I can't answer
24 them, we will certainly be happy to get the
25 experts on the Commission who can drill down more

1 deeply into some of these. But generally
2 speaking, transition coordinator positions, you
3 know, they're required by both Federal and State
4 regulations.

5 And my understanding is, you know, could
6 there be a few school districts out there that
7 have full-time, dedicated transition
8 coordinators? I suppose there could be, but
9 generally speaking, my understanding of what
10 happens typically is that someone else who is
11 already employed with the school district,
12 perhaps a special educator or someone else in the
13 administration, will have this transition
14 coordinator duty added onto their other duties.

15 And so, you know, technically they're
16 complying with the rules to have a transition
17 coordinator, but they're basically spread thin
18 and they're doing other things. That's my
19 understanding of how most school districts do
20 this.

21 DR. BADGER: May I -- may I jump in real
22 quick?

23 And I want to just add onto what Steve
24 said. Like I've seen it both ways. By training,
25 I'm a vocational rehab counselor. So during my

1 rotations, I've worked in a school district that
2 had a full-time transition coordinator. And I
3 can tell you, looking back at that time and
4 continuing to talk to some of the students that
5 graduated from that program -- or from that
6 school -- and had that transition counselor, the
7 success rate and the employment rate of those
8 individuals is significantly higher.

9 And I'm, you know, I can't give you exact
10 data, but working with schools across the State
11 for so many years, there is an obvious support
12 that is provided by this individual that connects
13 them to counseling, connects them to --
14 (AUDIO/VIDEO MALFUNCTION) -- have them, but it's
15 pretty rare.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you for
17 that.

18 And I will actually turn it over to OVR.
19 Shannon, if you would like to talk about what the
20 -- what OVR is doing in that particular space and
21 your work with PDE in developing those
22 relationships at our school districts.

23 MS. AUSTIN: So I'm going to circle back
24 a little bit because that's what I was. I'm a
25 rehab counselor by trade, so I went up the ranks,

1 but one of the things that Steve and Josie are
2 talking about -- so what happens is we have
3 counselors that go into the school districts to
4 work with them for referrals for a lot of the
5 students that we have. And if they don't have a
6 designated coordinator in the schools, they're
7 working with multiple special ed teachers. So
8 you can really feel the impact when you're going
9 in there because you're dealing with all
10 different teachers and trying to work with them
11 to get students into the system.

12 The other thing is -- and you can tell
13 the difference with whenever someone has that
14 coordinated or if it's a piece of their job
15 because the bandwidth, and for them to do that,
16 usually they have a class and then they're trying
17 to do that during one period during the day to
18 try to transition it. And if the school is huge
19 and you're talking about a three or a quad school
20 trying to manage all the students with
21 disabilities, the level of support that they need
22 is just not there for that.

23 So that being said, that is some of the
24 framework that's there. So I understand the
25 recommendation with that, as a counselor that has

1 went in and staffed -- going in to school
2 districts every day to engage to get students to,
3 you know, enact transition services.

4 Some of the work that we -- Carol has
5 been amazing to work with. I think historically,
6 prior to me and her, the relationship between OVR
7 and the Department of Education has been really
8 absent. There was -- I don't know why, but it
9 just was that way. And we came together about
10 two years ago, both of us new to our positions.
11 And that's when we began to work on the MOU
12 between us and BSC.

13 With that in mind, we had -- we met every
14 two weeks to make sure that, along with the tech
15 center to kind of broker the MOU that we
16 developed. Because of that, it became more
17 robust because of that two-year process that we
18 went through to develop the MOU. And it was
19 intentional. We are committed in so many areas
20 just beyond a piece of paper, just you know,
21 communication.

22 So when we rolled it out, we had three
23 webinars that were implemented. There's a lot of
24 supporting documentation on how to show up, who's
25 doing what, who's paying for what, we rolled out

1 a comprehensive website that has to do with
2 education. And you know for families,
3 stakeholder, there's tons of resources on
4 Pennsylvaniasecondaryeducation.org, where you can
5 get resources. And we continue to work together
6 through that process.

7 We are in the process of rolling out team
8 navigators that are going to be imbedded, one
9 transition navigator in all the IEU units across
10 the State. So 29 positions, and then there's
11 going to be two positions that are dedicated to
12 working with those that are Hispanic-speaking
13 across the State. So we're able to work with
14 those students transitioning, realizing that we
15 need to engage with families a little bit more to
16 break down some of the communication barriers
17 that we have.

18 We are also working very closely with
19 them on the youth ambassador position, where
20 students are going to have an opportunity to work
21 within special education units in the IU units in
22 particular. During the school year, working
23 anywhere from 10 to 20 hours a week, making
24 \$10.35 an hour for those students. So they're
25 going to be able to get a work-based learning

1 experience. And we just continue to go on and
2 on.

3 we're rebranding and bringing back the
4 employment connection with us, BSC, and with
5 Department of Aging ODP. So we're at the table
6 and you're going to see that kind of roll out
7 quarterly. And that is a lot of capacity,
8 building stuff that's going to happen with
9 transition and employment and working with
10 providers in those areas. It's going to be
11 virtual as we roll that out. And then we're
12 going to go back to face to face as the original
13 intent of that.

14 MR. BITER: Could I speak also on that?

15 In our local area, we have what we call
16 school-to-work program that we've developed. And
17 we work within the local school districts to --
18 you know, that are in that education, special
19 education realm that are looking for work, and
20 kind of to teach them some of those soft skills.

21 So part of their day, maybe one day a
22 week, two days a week, whatever that may be, they
23 leave that program and they come over to our
24 program and they're working. And they're paid
25 for that work at at least minimum wage. And it

1 doesn't say that they have to remain at our
2 agency after graduation. It just simply gives
3 them an idea of what work is, some of those soft
4 skills.

5 And I'll be honest, we've had some
6 communication with that, as well some problems
7 with that, with the Department of Education.
8 They've kind of -- they've given us some trouble
9 and the school district some trouble on what is
10 allowed. Because again, we're CIE, so those
11 students can come and work for us, but they've
12 had some misunderstanding, I think, with funding
13 as far as what they're allowed to send students
14 to do for work.

15 So we continue to reach out to those
16 school districts, let them know that we're an
17 option. But again some of those school districts
18 are very hesitant on sending those students for
19 that work-based experience.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: So just a
21 quick follow-up to that.

22 When you say they're unsure about what is
23 allowed, can you elaborate on that. With
24 funding -- you know, what are they saying isn't
25 allowed versus is allowed?

1 MR. BITER: I think they get held up on
2 the CIE, even though we are an approved CIE
3 location. They get hung up on that, that maybe
4 it's too segregated or it's not -- it's not CIE,
5 even though it is CIE. So we have that hiccup
6 and the educators are just -- the Department of
7 Education, I'm not sure what the language barrier
8 is there, but they're hesitant to open that up to
9 some of their students.

10 MR. SUROVIEC: I can -- I can fill in a
11 little bit more on that, as well.

12 The WIOA, the Workforce Innovations and
13 Opportunities Act, was passed -- I think it was
14 passed in 2014. There was a provision in there
15 that prohibits school districts from contracting
16 directly with basically segregated workshop
17 providers. I don't want to speak for the --
18 whatever dynamics are going on with CCABH, but I
19 do know that prior to 2014, school districts
20 would often have arrangements with sheltered
21 workshops, which are basically segregated
22 employment places where people typically would be
23 paid sub-minimum wage.

24 And WIOA specifically included a
25 provision where those agreements were no longer

1 allowed because Congress basically decided that
2 those relationships were leading to essentially a
3 pipeline from school right to segregated
4 sub-minimum wage jobs. So WIOA eliminated that
5 and requires that students receive pre-employment
6 condition services and also visit, you know,
7 their state's respective location for
8 Rehabilitation System if they're under age -- I
9 believe it's under age 26.

10 And before -- they have to go through all
11 of that before they can actually go to a
12 segregated program. Again, I don't want to speak
13 for whatever dynamics are going on with the
14 provider at the panel -- in the previous panel.

15 But generally speaking, that has led to
16 schools ending their relationships, the direct
17 relationships with those providers, and has
18 resulted in, you know, referrals going to those
19 programs ending because of the Federal law.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you.

21 I think Jack had a comment.

22 MR. ISEMAN: Yes.

23 We agree with what's been recommended,
24 the Employment First. In fact, we have at least
25 one SILC Board member on the Employment First

1 Commission currently. The 29 IUs is a nice
2 starting place, but I would agree that it needs
3 to be all 500 school districts, we have more
4 integrated classrooms. And it's got to be all
5 disabilities.

6 In terms of the -- in the Report, I noted
7 the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse,
8 they hired a staff from OVR. I won't name the
9 person, but very good staff who knows their --
10 and they actually came to our Board and did a
11 great presentation.

12 Unfortunately, we haven't seen a lot from
13 -- in terms of employment. In terms of the
14 Office of Long Term Living, I would agree,
15 particularly on Community Health Choices.
16 However, don't forget the people that are in the
17 waiver in the Act 150 and the people in the Act
18 150 do -- are employed. So there's, like
19 anything else, there still needs to be
20 improvement.

21 There have been presentations at the
22 MLTSS, Managed Long-Term Services and Supports.
23 That's -- I guess the question is with the MCOs,
24 the managed care organizations, what's the role
25 of the supports coordinator in all of this in

1 supporting someone that wants employment?

2 And some of those include employment, but
3 go beyond that. And I think we also -- I won't
4 get into it now, but veterans with disabilities.
5 I know OVR, in the past, had an MOU, memo of
6 understanding, on veterans. Which years ago,
7 great concept, that's another untapped resource.
8 We have younger folks who have just come back
9 from overseas. We have people who have been in
10 the system for a while who are veterans, another
11 place we could untap.

12 And then, I know this isn't the Workforce
13 Subcommittee, but Workforce Investment Boards.
14 The participation for people with disabilities,
15 it varies. You have some places where you have
16 disability organizations at the table. I think
17 we would probably like to see that more, both in
18 terms of the state and in terms of the regional
19 workforce investment boards, particularly in
20 community and integrated employment models, as
21 we're moving toward that direction.

22 Thank you.

23 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you.

24 Just checking to see if there are any
25 online questions. I don't believe there are any.

1 I just wanted to highlight a couple of
2 things out of the Report. It sounds like some of
3 the goals and objectives, Josie and Steve, you're
4 still waiting on some information from the
5 administration and still trying to work through
6 those; is that correct?

7 And since OVR is here, do you have a
8 particular ask of them, coming out of this Report
9 on that front?

10 MR. SUROVIEC: Well, the -- I mean,
11 Josie, you can jump in if you would like.

12 The answer to your question is, yes, we
13 are still waiting for certain data from the
14 administration. You know, I will say it's our
15 third year. There was some kind of growing
16 pains, like any time you have a new Commission
17 like this with new requirements.

18 We've had -- we get staff support from
19 the Governor's Office. I want to, you know,
20 compliment the staff that are -- that have been
21 working with us from the Governor's Policy
22 Office, but it's very difficult to get data
23 sometimes because of the timing. So you know,
24 sometimes data is a calendar year period.
25 Sometimes it's a state fiscal year period.

1 Sometimes it's a Federal fiscal year period.

2 And our mandate in Act 36 was to issue a
3 Report on October 1st. So sometimes if the data
4 is coming from a State agency that's ending, you
5 know, June 30th, that agency has to get it,
6 collect it, scrub it, send it to the Governor's
7 Office, and it comes to us. So there's often, a
8 lot of times, there's delays.

9 We're still getting -- you know, we're
10 still trying to get into a good rhythm where
11 we're getting the data elements pursuant to our
12 measurable goals and objectives in a format that,
13 you know, we can look at to see the most current
14 data as opposed to the last two or three years.
15 So I think, you know, the administration has made
16 a valiant effort, as we get some data, but I
17 wouldn't say it's perfect yet. And I think
18 there's a commitment to try and make that process
19 better over time.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Great.

21 MR. SUROVIEC: And in terms of OVR, we
22 get data from OVR. I don't have a specific ask.
23 I mean, obviously, again, we're trying to fine
24 tune the timeliness and the presentation of the
25 data. I mean, the Commissioners are -- we're all

1 volunteers. We have other -- we have other jobs
2 that, you know, during the day that we do.

3 And so, you know, if there was one ask --
4 it wouldn't just be for OVR, it would be for all
5 State agencies, to really get the data in a way
6 that's presented so that the Commissioners can
7 easily, you know, look at it, digest it, and then
8 consider it and make recommendations from it, but
9 that's not an OVR-specific request. That's more
10 of an overall general request.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRWOMAN KLUNK: Thank you,
12 Steven.

13 It sounds like Shannon and the Department
14 are really truly willing to work with all of us
15 on this coming out of this hearing. And
16 hopefully they can get you the data, and again,
17 across State agencies, so that you can deliver us
18 a Report next year hopefully with some additional
19 good information.

20 I know COVID really threw a monkey wrench
21 into a lot of this. So I think, you know, we're
22 going to need some asterisks on some of the data
23 point from 2020 to 2021. But hopefully coming
24 out of this we can get some new data and
25 hopefully we're all moving and growing in the

1 right direction.

2 Just a couple of things to wrap up. I
3 certainly would love to do a follow-up hearing in
4 the future on where the State stands with the
5 Office of Administration, Civil Service
6 Commission, and other agencies to learn about
7 what the State is doing in our governmental
8 agencies in this space with hiring. So certainly
9 looking forward to a potential hearing in the
10 future on that.

11 Also, just wanted to thank the Commission
12 for your Report. There's a lot of really good
13 information here as policymakers that we can take
14 back, have some internal discussions within the
15 Committee to see, you know, what we can do in
16 this space. And I do think the one point that
17 you brought up about moving that Report due date
18 is something that we can certainly can look into
19 to make that a bit easier. Because sometimes we
20 pick dates, we don't understand how that's all
21 going to play out once you are in the weeds with
22 all the data. So that's certainly something that
23 we can talk about and look forward to working
24 with you on.

25 With that, I don't see any additional

1 questions, but I think this was a really good
2 hearing where we can, you know, all take
3 something from it. I think we all, you know,
4 learned a little bit more about what is happening
5 in this. I think there's a lot of room for work
6 on all of our parts for, you know, encouraging
7 those with disabilities to get out there and
8 work.

9 I think they're a wonderful untapped
10 resource in our Commonwealth. We have the
11 support systems available across the
12 Commonwealth, so many great people working in
13 this space. We just need to make sure that we
14 have better connections, better communication so
15 that we can untap all of those resources and
16 really unleash that potential that's out there.

17 So thank you so much for everyone that
18 joined us today. I look forward to continuing
19 conversations on this topic. And with that, we
20 are adjourned.

21 Thank you.

22 (Whereupon, the proceedings concluded
23 at 12:15 p.m.)
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

I hereby certify that the proceedings are contained fully and accurately in the notes taken by me from audio of the within proceedings and that this is a correct transcript of the same.

Tiffany L. Mast

Tiffany L. Mast

Court Reporter