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Disability Employment Task Force Meeting – 10/17/18 - Minutes

The meeting was held at the Microsoft Conference Center in Redmond, WA following the Governor's Disability Employment Awards Ceremony. In attendance were: Robert Hines (DSHS), Effenus Henderson (Diversity Officer - retired, Weyerhaeuser), Toby Olson (Executive Secretary, GCDE), Eleni Papadakis (WTECB), Tammy Pitre (OFM), and Colleen Fukui-Sketchley. Libby Hollingshead (Office of the Lt Governor) called in by phone.

Introductions: Jim Baumgart provided introduction for group members

Tammy Pitre provided an update on achieving the goals identified in Executive Order 13-02. The state remains below the stated goal of 5% of the workforce being employees with a self-disclosed disability. As of 2018, only 3.1% of the state agency workforce are persons with disabilities. Approximately, 6% of the state workforce is comprised of persons with disabilities. Of the employees retiring from state service, greater than 5% are persons with disabilities. Principally, the state is experiencing not only a recruitment but also a retention problem for increasing the number of persons with disabilities in state employment.

Tammy Pitre and Toby Olson facilitated a discussion on what interventions will help change this trend in state employment. The question posed was how do we get the message out that "We want you".

- We lack applicant flow data to determine where in the process a person with disabilities does not progress in the hiring process.
- This might include integrating support service with health care treatment that focuses on getting back to work, including light duty positions and reasonable accommodations for returning employees. 60% of workers aged 18-64 acquired their disability after reaching work age.
- Where do we brief the performance expectation for agencies? The goal of 5% of the workforce is well established; it may require an executive team review of agency plans based on percentage of employees with disabilities.

Toby Olson remarked that 25 state agencies have yet to complete to Disability Equality Index (DEI) and the accompanying supplemental questionnaire. This index helps agencies get a better understanding "what right looks like" for a workplace. We should encourage the remaining agencies to complete the index.

Eleni Papadakis highlighted the fact that education is most often a means to employment and that we still have barriers for persons with disabilities in accessing higher education. Transfers within the higher education system for persons with disabilities can be slow as the disability data migration and test for services is difficult to share from one institution to another, adversely affecting student enrollment. Fully funding the statewide need grant would also help access to education.

There was a brief discussion of the newly established Disability Inclusion Network Business Resource Group (DIN BRG). The DIN BRG exists to engage the experience, values and knowledge of people with disabilities in state government, promoting universal access, and creating an environment where people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of the workplace. This is the fifth such group within our state workforce. Statewide business resource groups (BRGs) bring together groups of employees and their allies who have a common interest or characteristic. All BRGs have a charter, mission, goals and bylaws and contribute to an overall statewide business strategy. BRG members bring their unique knowledge and perspectives, making them an asset to state business needs, such as recruitment and retention.

There was a renewed discussion of a centralized funding model for reasonable accommodations in the workplace. Eleni Papadakis committed to working with Jim Baumgart on this issue.

The group agreed the next steps should be to review the OFM annual data on workforce diversity, equity and inclusion while reviewing DEI and supplemental questionnaire to present to the governor's executive team for discussion at a future cabinet meeting.