



# MEDIA RELEASE

State of Tennessee  
Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

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## **Coalition Forms to Focus on Employment for Persons with Disabilities**

*Governor's Executive Order establishes State's role in leading the effort*

**NASHVILLE-** Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) Commissioner Debra Payne today announced that the department will convene an Employment First Task Force to focus on employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This comes as a result of an executive order issued by Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam on June 19 establishing state support for the Employment First initiative, which involves a coalition of state agencies and key stakeholders including the departments of Labor and Workforce Development, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Education, Human Services, the Bureau of TennCare, the Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, the Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee and the University of Tennessee Center for Literacy, Education and Employment.

This workgroup typifies a cooperative dedication to ensure that state systems and policies are aggressively identifying and eliminating barriers to successful outcomes for Tennesseans with disabilities.

The Employment First initiative is dedicated to increasing meaningful employment opportunities for persons living with a disability. In addition to the public acknowledgement of support for the Employment First initiative, the signed order supports Gov. Haslam's key directives to further align state departments with the priority of making integrated and competitive employment a reality for persons with disabilities. The order further directs dedicated parties to develop programming, training and best practice strategies designed to meet the goal of increasing integrated employment opportunities compensated at a competitive wage for persons with disabilities who desire to work.

As is documented in many recent studies related to the State of Tennessee's economic prosperity under the Haslam administration, while our Nation continues to recover from recession, Tennessee is experiencing significant growth within our job markets.

- *Site Selection Magazine* named Tennessee the 4<sup>th</sup> most competitive state for job creation
- Tennessee was awarded *Area Development* magazine's 2012 Gold Shovel Award for significant success in terms of job creation and economic impact
- CNBA ranked Tennessee the 7<sup>th</sup> top destination state for jobs

Public understanding and opinions relative to the positive impact persons living with a disability can have on the workplace have changed dramatically in recent years. It is now nationally recognized and recently exclaimed publically by the National Governors Association (NGA), that hiring persons with disabilities is no longer viewed as benevolence; it is viewed as effective business strategy. This executive order

establishes that persons with disabilities will have as equal an opportunity to experience the positive impact of our state's successes as persons within our general workforce.

"It is well established that meaningful work is the cornerstone of good physical, emotional and behavioral health for all Americans," DIDD Commissioner Debra Payne said. "The work that we do provides for our independence, allows us to experience a sense of pride and accomplishment, and is fundamental to our sense of contribution to our communities. The relationships we form with coworkers often provide us with lifelong friendships and support us through the trials of life. Work is true integration, and it is the expectation of all parties participating in this important endeavor that every person with a desire to experience the benefits of employment will have that opportunity."

The first Employment First Task Force meeting is scheduled for August 1, 2013.

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