

**Purchasing from People with Disabilities Advisory Committee
Report to the Texas Workforce Commission**

Overview

The Purchasing from People with Disabilities (PPD) Advisory Committee was established by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) under Texas Human Resources Code §122.005. Both §122.0057(h)(1) and Texas Administrative Code §806.21(b)(1) require the committee to set specific objectives for the PPD program.

The PPD Advisory Committee consists of the following 13 members appointed by TWC:

- Two individuals with disabilities not employed by Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs)
- Two individuals with disabilities employed by CRPs
- Four individuals from CRPs
- Four individuals from organizations that advocate for people with disabilities
- The Executive Commissioner of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) or a designee

The current committee members are as follows:

Brooke Hohfeld	Disability Representative Not Employed by CRP
Kathy Williams	Disability Representative Not Employed by CRP
Brande Lacy	Disability Representative Employed by CRP
Lee Tillson	Disability Representative Employed by CRP
Giovianna Washington	Advocate Representative
Michael Swoboda	Advocate Representative
Monica Mishaw	Advocate Representative
Linda Logan	Advocate Representative
Sean Quigley	CRP Representative
James (Jim) Meehan	CRP Representative
Platt Allen	CRP Representative
Charlie Graham	CRP Representative
Kay Molina	HHSC Representative

Background

The PPD Advisory Committee has developed objectives in keeping with the stated purpose of Texas Human Resources Code, Chapter 122, Purchasing from People with Disabilities, “to further the state’s policy of encouraging and assisting persons with disabilities to achieve maximum personal independence by engaging in useful and productive employment activities and, in addition, to provide state agencies, departments, and institutions and political subdivisions of the state with a method for achieving conformity with requirements of nondiscrimination and affirmative action in employment matters related to persons with disabilities.”

The committee held meetings to deliberate on proposed objectives on November 6, 2020, February 19, 2021, and May 14, 2021. The following objectives were unanimously adopted on May 14, 2021.

PPD Advisory Committee Recommended Objectives

Objective 1: Promote the employment potential of people with disabilities

Many employers give little consideration to the possibility of hiring people with disabilities because of the persistent assumption that an individual with a disability cannot perform the necessary tasks for a given job. Promoting employment potential may include educating employers by gathering and sharing evidence and data about how individuals with disabilities have demonstrated equivalent or higher performance in a range of positions typically not considered appropriate for an individual with a disability. Stories about individual successes are useful as well, but efforts should be made to measure, record, and share data that demonstrates that the performance of people with disabilities can be expected to match or exceed that of those who do not have a disability. Promoting employment potential may also involve encouraging employers to routinely reach out to organizations representing people with disabilities when jobs are advertised. Focused effort is needed.

Objective 2: Optimize and enhance career advancement for people with disabilities through vocational assessment and job training

The same supports and techniques that are used to help people who do not have disabilities advance in their careers can also be effective for people with disabilities. Information about these opportunities should be made easily accessible to employees with disabilities as well as to employers.

Objective 3: Expand opportunities in competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities

The development of an expanded array of positions in competitive integrated employment requires agency focus and outreach as well as education of potential employers and employees.

Objective 4: Define and promote living wages for individuals with disabilities in their communities

TWC, Texas legislators, advocates, and others have successfully worked to ensure that people with disabilities employed in the PPD program receive at least the federal minimum wage. However, the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour is not a living wage for people in many locations.

Raising the required wage for people with disabilities to the current federal minimum wage is of limited value if people are still unable to live independently without a federal subsidy such as Social Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), and Medicaid.

Some political subdivisions have addressed the inadequacy of the current federal minimum wage, which has been in effect since July 2009, by raising the local minimum wage as high as \$15 per hour, and calls are increasing for a similar change nationally. Between 2009 and 2021, the average cost of all items in the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index US City Average rose by more than 23 percent, with even more significant overall increases in the cost of

rent and medical care (39 percent) and the average cost of a house (47 percent) (“Federal Minimum Wage Hasn’t Risen Since 2009. But Our Living Costs Have Soared,” *Newsweek*, May 11, 2021).

Information about and focus on the elements of a living wage will also be valuable to the PPD program when the federal government raises its general minimum wage. The current minimum wage for federal contracts is \$10.95 per hour. Beginning March 30, 2022, federal agencies will be required to incorporate the \$15 minimum wage into new contract solicitations and into existing contracts extended by the contracting parties. Planning for such an increase in the general federal minimum wage will be helped by understanding differences in living wages across Texas.

Next Steps

PPD staff will work with the Advisory Committee to discuss strategies for monitoring progress on the objectives.