

# **S.B. 1226**

## **83<sup>rd</sup> Texas Legislature (R)**

### **EMPLOYMENT-FIRST POLICY & TASK FORCE**

**Relating to the establishment of an employment-first policy and task force to promote competitive employment opportunities that provide a living wage for individuals with disabilities.**

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#### **EMPLOYMENT-FIRST POLICY**

Sec. 531.02447 (a). It is the policy of the state that earning a living wage through competitive employment in the general workforce is the priority and preferred outcome for working-age individuals with disabilities who receive public benefits.”

Sec. 531.02447 (b). The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) shall jointly adopt and implement an employment-first policy in accordance with the state's policy under Subsection (a). The policy must:

- (1) affirm that an individual with a disability is able to meet the same employment standards as an individual who does not have a disability;
- (2) ensure that all working-age individuals with disabilities, including young adults, are offered factual information regarding employment as an individual with a disability, including the relationship between an individual's earned income and the individual's public benefits;
- (3) ensure that individuals with disabilities are given the opportunity to understand and explore options for education or training, including postsecondary, graduate, and postgraduate education, vocational or technical training, or other training, as pathways to employment;
- (4) promote the availability and accessibility of individualized training designed to prepare an individual with a disability for the individual's preferred employment;
- (5) promote partnerships with employers to overcome barriers to meeting workforce needs with the creative use of technology and innovation;
- (6) ensure that the staff of public schools, vocational service programs, and community providers are trained and supported to assist in achieving the goal of competitive employment for all individuals with disabilities; and
- (7) ensure that competitive employment, while being the priority and preferred outcome, is not required of an individual with a disability to secure or maintain public benefits for which the individual is otherwise eligible.

## EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Executive Commissioner shall establish an interagency Employment-First Task Force ... to promote competitive employment of individuals with disabilities and the expectation that individuals with disabilities are able to meet the same employment standards, responsibilities, and expectations as any other working-age adult. (Sec. 531.02448 (a))

The Task Force shall:

(1) design an **education and outreach process**

- targeted at
  - ✓ working-age individuals with disabilities, including young adults with disabilities
  - ✓ the families of those individuals
  - ✓ HHSC, DARS, DSHS, DADS, DFPS, TWC, and TEA
  - ✓ service providers
- that is aimed at raising expectations of the success of individuals with disabilities in integrated, individualized, and competitive employment;

(2) **develop recommendations** for

- policy,
- procedure, and
- rules changes

that are necessary to allow the Employment-First policy required to be jointly adopted and implemented by HHSC, TEA and TWC to be fully implemented;

(3) prepare a **Report**

- by September 1 of each even-numbered year (1<sup>st</sup> Report: 9/1/2014),
- regarding the Task Force's **findings and recommendations**, including:
  - ✓ information that reflects the potential and actual impact of the employment-first policy on the employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities; and
  - ✓ recommendations for improvement of employment services and outcomes, including employment rates, for individuals with disabilities based on the reported impact of an employment-first policy that may include:
    - recommendations relating to using any savings to the state resulting from the implementation of the employment-first policy to further improve the services and outcomes; and
    - recommendations regarding necessary policy, procedure, and rules changes for the improvement of employment services and outcomes.
- Submit the Report to
  - ✓ the Office of the Governor,
  - ✓ the Texas Legislature, and
  - ✓ the Executive Commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission.

(Sec. 531.02448 (f))

The section of law establishing the Task Force expires September 1, 2017.

(Sec. 531.02448 (j))