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GOVERNOR AND FLORIDA CABINET HIGHLIGHT PROGRAM TO MATCH FLORIDIANS WITH DISABILITIES TO JOBS

AbilitiesWork.employflorida.com

TALLAHASSEE – Governor Rick Scott and the Florida Cabinet highlighted recent efforts to promote more employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and efforts to assist employers in finding and hiring these talented individuals to be part of their workforce. Yesterday morning’s presentation included an overview of the new Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk to help link employers to job seekers who have disabilities.

Governor Scott said, “Our mission is to ensure that every Floridian can get a great job. I would like to thank everyone involved with the Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk for making employment a reality for many more Floridians. Connecting Floridians with disabilities to employers benefits everyone, and we must continue working each day to make sure everyone who wants a job can have one.”

The Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk are key components of a larger effort, the Employment First Initiative, announced last year. The portal and help desk are designed to help employers recruit and hire more applicants with disabilities who are ready and able to work, and inform them of the available support that can help an individual succeed on the job. This initiative was recommended by Governor Scott’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities to better link employers to qualified job-seekers with disabilities in their communities. This also supports the established commitment among multiple interagency partners involved with the Employment First Initiative to prioritize employment for individuals with disabilities served by state programs to help them achieve greater independence and self-fulfillment, as required by Governor Scott’s Executive Order 13-284.

The Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities, the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), the Florida Department of Education’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Blind Services, and Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, the Department of Children and Families’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Program, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, the Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, and CareerSource Florida, all participants in the Employment First Initiative, have partnered to implement the Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk.

DEO created the Abilities Work Web Portal within the Employ Florida Marketplace, the state’s official online job-matching and career development tool, to accomplish this purpose. The new web portal will help employers identify qualified job candidates with disabilities and post job openings. The portal will also assist job seekers and students with disabilities in finding job opportunities and link them with career centers and other resources that can help them obtain and keep employment.

During the 2014 Legislative Session, Governor Scott and the Florida Legislature provided funding to create the Abilities Work Help Desk within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to accompany the web portal. Employers can reach the Help Desk through a toll-free number, 1-844-245-3405. It is staffed by three knowledgeable professionals who can assist employers interested in recruiting individuals with disabilities as part of their workforce, and provide them with information and referral services that can support their business needs.

DEO Executive Director Jesse Panuccio said, “Gainful employment affirms the inherent worth of an individual by providing a productive outlet for our talents, skills, and dedication. A job is a life-changing opportunity for all Floridians and we are excited to be able to assist Floridians with disabilities on this journey.”

"The Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk will connect educated and skilled Floridians with disabilities with employers in their communities, strengthening our workforce and our economy," said Commissioner of Education Pam Stewart. "I'm pleased the Department of Education's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Blind Services and Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services could collaborate with such dedicated partners to bring this project to life."

Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) Director Barbara Palmer said, “I am very excited to see the launch of both the Abilities Work job portal and help desk. Helping people with disabilities get and keep jobs is a top priority for APD. Also, as a member of the Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities, we are happy to see this idea become a reality. People with disabilities are just like everyone else—they want the opportunity to prove themselves, and the job portal and help desk are going to assist them in accomplishing their goals.”

“Individuals with disabilities, like everyone else, want their shot at success and to make a lasting contribution to our state. We believe employers want to hire these individuals – not because of a disability – but because they recognize the talent and value they bring to their business. “Abilities Work” represents Florida’s commitment to help employers recognize and find this talent, and will expand opportunities for these individuals to succeed in their career and life endeavors,” said David Darm, Executive Director, Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities.

“Dedicated and hard-working, Floridians with disabilities have abilities that make them a true asset in the workplace,” said CareerSource Florida President and CEO Chris Hart IV. “The new Abilities Work portal enhances our collective efforts to connect these ready-to-work individuals with employers who are ready to hire.”

Aleisa McKinlay, Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), said, “VR’s mission is to help Floridians with disabilities get or keep a job, and enhance their independence. Employers are an essential part of this equation. The Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk are designed to link Florida’s employers with the supports and services they need to find, hire,

and retain qualified employees with disabilities. Together, we can ensure that these talented folks are a vital part of the workforce and their communities!"

Division of Blind Services (DBS) Director Robert L. Doyle, III, said, "The launch of the Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk is an exciting stride in our continuous effort to increase job opportunities for individuals with disabilities. We have incredibly talented individuals with a wide variety of skills seeking employment through our vocational rehabilitation programs; these new tools will assist in matching qualified candidates with job opportunities while also increasing awareness amongst employers. We at DBS are especially excited that the portal is accessible to blind and visually impaired job seekers who use screen reading software and other assistive technology."

Monica Verra-Tirado, the Bureau Chief of the Exceptional Education and Student Services of FDOE, stated, "Positive post-school outcomes are a major indicator of the success of our education programs for students with disabilities, so we are excited to be working with our partners on the Employment First effort. We look forward to seeing more of our students obtaining successful employment with support from the Abilities Work Web Portal and collaborative partnerships."

Debra Dowds, Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) Executive Director said, "We are delighted to be a partner in this initiative. The collaborative efforts among major agencies and organizations serving individuals with disabilities are unprecedented in our state, and these efforts are beginning to pay off with tangible products and resources that will assist individuals with disabilities in securing competitive employment!"

Ute Gazioch, Director of the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health at the Department of Children and Families said, "The Department of Children and Families, Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health is very excited to be a partner in this important initiative. Employment provides a sense of purpose, hope and opportunity for independence, all essential factors to recovery for persons with behavioral health conditions."

"On behalf of the membership of Florida ARF and the RESPECT of Florida program, we are pleased to be a part of Florida's Employment First initiative and are excited to see the positive outcomes that are being generated by the partner agencies. Accomplishments such as the Abilities Work Portal and Help Desk demonstrate the participants' commitment to creating real jobs for people with disabilities," said Suzanne Sewell, President & CEO, Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (ARF).

For more information, please visit the Abilities Work Web Portal at <http://AbilitiesWork.employflorida.com>. The Help Desk can be contacted at 1-844-245-3405 or AbilitiesWorkHD@vr.fldoe.org.

About DEO

The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity combines the state's economic, workforce, and community development efforts. This new approach helps expedite economic

development projects to fuel job creation in competitive communities. For more information, including valuable resources for employers and job seekers, please visit www.floridajobs.org.

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