



Photo courtesy of Project SEARCH

Please join the Council in supporting HB 211: The Employment First Bill

WHAT IS IT?

The Employment First Bill directs all state agencies to focus on employment in the general workforce as the first and preferred outcome for all working-age Alaskans with disabilities.

- State agencies that provide services to persons with disabilities must consider integrated and competitive employment as the first and preferred option in planning services for working-age individuals with disabilities.
- All state agencies that provide support to individuals with disabilities must follow the policy described above and ensure that it is effectively implemented in their programs and services.
- The Employment First Bill does not require employers to give preference to hiring persons with disabilities. All individuals should be hired commensurate with their abilities and qualifications.

HOW WILL IT WORK?

- The Departments of Education, Labor and Health & Social Services will annually provide data on the services and employment of individuals with disabilities to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.
- For these departments:
 - Gainful employment means full or part time-work where wages are no less than those paid for the same or similar work performed by individuals without disabilities.
 - The priority of all services, education and training is employment in the general workforce in integrated, community settings, where individuals with disabilities work alongside individuals without disabilities (i.e., not employment in enclaves or sheltered workshops).

WHY IS IT NEEDED?

- Employment has been associated with lower health care costs to federal and state benefit programs, according to a 2013 study at Kansas State University.
- In Alaska, approximately 47% of individuals with a disability are currently employed, compared to the 80% of individuals who are employed in the general population.¹
- Alaskan employers need to plan ahead to fill the gap in available workforce due to the retirement of the *Baby Boomer* generation. Employers are missing out on an integral and untapped segment of the workforce when they do not consider individuals with disabilities to meet their employment needs.
- Work provides a meaningful outlet for skills and talents. It is often how individuals form their identity within their community. Individuals with disabilities want the opportunity to work.

Please support HB 211.

¹ American Community Survey, 2011.