



# Barriers to Employment for Pennsylvanians with Disabilities

Employment often defines people—what they do and where they work shapes many aspects of their lives. For disabled Pennsylvanians, having meaningful, fulfilling work is crucial, yet there remains much progress to be made in this area.

According to the US Bureau Labor and Statistics, In 2022, the employment rate for people with disabilities in Pennsylvania was 23.1%, compared to 66.4% for those without disabilities. This indicates a significant disparity in employment opportunities between disabled and non-disabled individuals in the state.

**Statewide Advocates Influencing Leadership (SAIL) is a community-driven coalition and training project focused on fostering leadership and advocacy among people with disabilities across Pennsylvania. Our group is designed by and for individuals with disabilities, ensuring that the support we provide is both relevant and impactful.**

**Created in partnership with PA REV UP**



## **Barriers to Meaningful Employment**

- Many disabled people are forced to choose to work a lower-paying, less fulfilling job to remain eligible for their benefits, including healthcare and attendant / nursing care.
- Lack of accessible transportation can severely limit disabled Pennsylvanian’s employment prospects.

## **Discrimination in the Workplace**

- A stigma against hiring and promoting employees with disabilities continues to exist in the work culture.
- Obtaining a “reasonable accommodation” in the workplace as permitted by the Americans with Disabilities Act can be a challenging and stressful process.

## **Subminimum Wage Continues**

- Section 14(C) of the Fair Labor Standards Act permits employers to apply for a certificate that allows them to pay disabled employees below minimum wage.
- In certain circumstances people with disabilities are allowed to be paid per item that they make or task that they do, resulting in wages that are significantly lower than minimum wage. This payment structure often occurs within segregated, sheltered workshops where employees with disabilities have minimal interaction with nondisabled peers.
- This practice inhibits employees with disabilities from attaining gainful employment and financial Independence.



# Employment for Pennsylvanians with Disabilities Recommendations

## Supporting Meaningful Employment

- Supports need to be implemented to improve access to affordable and accessible transportation for workers with disabilities who rely on transportation for employment. Rideshare programs should be further explored and supported for places of employment.
- Expand Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD) in PA
- Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD) is a Medicaid buy-in program in Pennsylvania for people with disabilities that are significant enough to make them eligible for Social Security but have an earned income that would otherwise make them ineligible for Medical Assistance (Medicaid). This program allows individuals to receive Medical Assistance and waiver services while working.
- Increasing the income and asset limits for all enrollees, it would allow more individuals to pursue jobs.
- Each County Assistance Office should have a certified benefits counselor on staff to support individuals who are pursuing employment.
- The pandemic highlighted both the feasibility and the need to offer more remote employment opportunities that allow disabled employees to thrive.

## Addressing Discrimination in the Workplace

- Legislate Stronger Protections: Implement stronger regulations that protect the rights of disabled individuals, ensuring robust enforcement and accountability measures.
- Promote Inclusive Leadership: Encourage the hiring and promotion of disabled individuals into leadership positions to ensure diverse perspectives in decision-making processes and to foster a culture of inclusion from the top down.

## Eliminate subminimum wage (14 Cs).

- Individuals should have the right to competitive integrated employment where they work alongside people with and without disabilities and to earn at least minimum wage. One example is the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act (TCIEA).

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- Standardizing the premiums, and increasing the income and asset limits for all enrollees, it would allow more individuals to pursue jobs.
- Each County Assistance Office should have a certified benefits counselor on staff to support individuals who are pursuing employment.

Support Infrastructure initiatives that improve transportation options for workers with disabilities

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