



## Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities

**John R. Kasich**, Governor

**Kevin L. Miller**, Executive Director

**Testimony of Kevin L. Miller, Executive Director**  
**Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities**  
**House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services**  
**Wednesday, March 1, 2017**

Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and distinguished committee members, my name is Kevin Miller and I am the Executive Director of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). I am pleased to present our 2018-2019 Biennial Budget for your consideration.

OOD is responsible for assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment, independence, and Social Security disability determination outcomes through the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired, and the Division of Disability Determination.

In 2011, when I was first appointed by Governor Kasich to lead OOD, our priorities were clear:

- Eliminate the waiting list, which impacted more than 17,000 individuals with disabilities,
- Address the outstanding state and federal compliance issues,
- Establish accountability metrics for ourselves, as well as our local partners, and
- Create a fee schedule for vocational rehabilitation services.

We were also facing a potential layoff of vocational rehabilitation counselors. Needless to say, six years ago we were facing many challenges.

### **OOD Accomplishments**

Thanks to Governor Kasich, the General Assembly, our staff, and partners, we have been able to address these challenges and have accomplished all of the following:

- Released more than 17,000 individuals from the waiting list. Now, for the first time since 1991, we are serving all categories of individuals with disabilities including those currently working but at risk of losing their job due to the onset of a disability.
- Redesigned our vocational rehabilitation service delivery system to annually support more than 30,000 Ohioans with disabilities to work toward achieving their employment goals.
- Increased the average wage earned by individuals with disabilities to \$11.14 per hour, while averaging 27 hours worked per week.

- Increased the number of individuals successfully employed by 97%, while reducing the cost to achieve those outcomes by more than 26%.
- Increased the number of new job plans written by more than 118%.
- Created and expanded the Employment First partnership with the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Since its inception, 4,500 job seekers have engaged in VR services and 1,316 individuals have obtained competitive integrated employment through this initiative.
- Launched the Ohio Transition Support Partnership (OTSP) with the Ohio Department of Education. OTSP is focused on improving employment outcomes for students with disabilities, by helping them get a head start on becoming job-ready and better prepared with the skills necessary to be successful in today's workforce. Under this partnership, we are able to serve an additional 3,300 students with disabilities.
- Increased partnerships with hundreds of employers across the state who are committed to creating jobs and hiring individuals with disabilities. This focused business relations model has resulted in an increase in the number of employer members of Ohio's Business Leadership Network (BLN), a division of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. There are currently more than 125 BLN members and growing.
- Designed and implemented the Workplace Initiative of Ohio funded through a Poses Family Foundation grant. This initiative directly sources job-ready candidates with disabilities with partner employers and since the inception more than 850 individuals have found employment.
- Developed and implemented a web-based VR portal called OODWORKS.com that has improved access to VR services for individuals with disabilities.
- Achieved the lowest cost-per-case ratio for Social Security disability determination in our six-state Chicago Region.
- Committed to the utilization of Lean Six-Sigma methodologies and incorporated them as part of our workplace culture, with over 150 staff trained at various levels. This has resulted in multiple transformational process improvements.

These accomplishments have elevated the national standing for Ohio's vocational rehabilitation and disability determination programs. Other states are continually seeking out OOD's best practices in a variety of areas. Michigan and Indiana sent delegations to Ohio and implemented our methods for processing and adjudicating disability determination claims. Minnesota created a program modeled after OOD's Employment First partnership with DODD. The Poses Family Foundation, which supports disability workplace initiatives across the nation, recommends "the Ohio model" as a national standard.

### **OOD SFY 2018-2019 Budget**

While we celebrate our accomplishments, I continue to impress upon our staff that we have more work to do. We will continue to be relentless in our pursuit of excellence in serving individuals with disabilities. Moving into the 2018-2019 Biennium, there are three new federal mandates that will create additional demand on available resources for the VR program.

First, under Section 511 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) OOD is required to provide career counseling services to approximately 18,500 individuals in Ohio who, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, are being paid subminimum wage. These services must be provided on an annual basis, in perpetuity.

A second requirement under Section 511 relates to services to youth with disabilities. Effective July 22, 2016, any youth, which is defined as 24 years of age and younger, who wants to begin work under a subminimum wage certificate must first be provided services by OOD for a “reasonable period of time.” OOD must provide documentation of these services and show that the individual was unable to achieve a competitive integrated employment outcome before the youth can begin to work under the subminimum wage certificate.

Under a third WIOA requirement, OOD must make pre-employment transition services available to all students with disabilities. There are an estimated 50,000 students on an individualized education plan age 14 and older in Ohio who may benefit from VR services.

OOD’s chief priority moving into the next biennium is to ensure the provision of sustainable vocational rehabilitation services without reinstating a waiting list. We will continue to partner with the Ohio Departments of Developmental Disabilities and Education. We are committed to build on the success of the Employment First partnership to promote competitive integrated employment. We will increase services to students with disabilities in school districts statewide. We remain focused on building relationships with Ohio employers and more effectively matching our job-ready candidates with employment opportunities that our business partners are looking to fill. And we will continue to focus efforts on services to underserved populations, such as individuals who are blind or visually impaired and those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The Executive Budget provides the funding necessary for OOD to maintain its state and local partnerships, as well as the current level of federally matched funding. The Executive Budget will allow us to build upon our success and face the challenges ahead to effectively serve even more Ohioans with disabilities in their pursuit of employment and independence.

It is important to remember that individuals with disabilities want the same opportunities as everyone else. They want a chance to demonstrate their abilities, be productive and add value to their communities. Through our work with our employer partners, we have opened doors for individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain competitive integrated employment. I respectfully ask for your support of our budget as introduced. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.