

New York State Senate Hearing on Disabilities and Employment

May 6, 2026 | 10 a.m.

Stanford J. Perry, CEO, AHRC Nassau, Brookville Center for Children’s Services, and Citizens Options Unlimited

Thank you, Senator Fahy and Senator Ramos for holding this joint public hearing on how disability services and workforce systems support people with disabilities to obtain and maintain Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE).

I serve as the CEO of AHRC Nassau, Brookville Center for Children’s Services, and Citizens Options Unlimited supporting more than 4,000 Long Islanders with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

I have worked in this sector for over 35 years, and I can say we are still circling many of the same questions. The difference now is we’ve seen what works. When government partners with advocates and providers, systems change and so do expectations. I saw this firsthand when sustained attention and funding led to fivefold national growth¹ in integrated employment between 1988 and 2002.

We must regain that momentum. People with IDD remain underemployed, despite protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the integration mandate established by *Olmstead v. L.C.* In 2023, approximately 19% of New Yorkers supported by the state’s disabilities system contributed to integrated settings by working or preparing for employment.² We can do better.

To earn a paycheck is to contribute to New York State. It strengthens independence³ and demonstrates equality. It shows people with developmental disabilities giving back to the community and paying taxes like everyone else.

Barriers certainly remain, from “low expectations ” to “transportation, definitions of

¹ Braddock, D., Rizzolo, M., & Hemp, R. (2024). Most employment services growth in developmental disabilities during 1988-2002 was in segregated settings. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 42(4). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/8477390_Most_Employment_Services_Growth_in_Developmental_Disabilities_During_1988-2002_Was_in_Segregated_Settings

² ThinkWork, Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston. (n.d.) State Snapshots: New York. <https://www.thinkwork.org/statedata/state-snapshots>

³ Whitney, D., Warren, C., Smith, J., Arenales, M., Meyers, S., Devaney, M., & Christian, L. (2021). Work expectations of adults with developmental disabilities. *Alter*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1875067220300444>

employment models, and lack of training on the business world.⁴

Yet, research continually shows disability inclusion can boost revenue, net income, and economic profit.⁵ With these outcomes, New York-based employers may be interested in this untapped workforce but lack clear pathways, training, support, or accommodations to see a compelling business case.

To fully meet the promise of New York as an Employment First State⁶, increased partnership, alignment, and investment is needed across state agencies.

Supported employment must ensure people who have long relied on site-based services have employment as a prioritized outcome under home- and community-based services.

OPWDD must also reimburse employment services⁷ on par with day services and other supports. At a time of rising costs and funding uncertainty, providers face challenges, shifting staff supports, and cost centers. These barriers should be removed and employment outcomes incentivized within an Employment First system.

Kyle Thompson's life shows us what's possible. He has received services since he was four years old and attended a day habilitation program until recently. With AHRC Nassau's supported employment program, Kyle is now employed two days a week as a farm hand at Wheatley Farms & Arts Center, where he is passionate about animal care.

Kyle's goal is to live independently. However, like many people with disabilities, increasing

⁴ Lyons, O., Timmons, L., Hall, A., Enein-Donovan, & Kamau, K. (2022). The benefits of person-centered job placement: Results from providers undergoing organizational transformation from sheltered employment (Manuscript). *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. https://www.aaid.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/results-from-service-providers-undergoing-organizational-transformation-away-from-sheltered-employment.pdf?sfvrsn=4ae53a21_0

⁵ Accenture. (2023, Nov. 27). Companies that lead in disability inclusion outperform peers financially. <https://newsroom.accenture.com/news/2023/companies-that-lead-in-disability-inclusion-outperform-peers-financially-reveals-new-research-from-accenture>

⁶ New York State Executive Chamber. (2024, September 30). Executive Order No.40: Committing New York to be an Employment First state to increase competitive integrated employment for New Yorkers with disabilities. <https://www.governor.ny.gov/executive-order/no40-committing-new-york-be-employment-first-state-increase-competitive-integrated>

⁷ New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities. (2025, January 23). OPWDD announces \$850 million dollar investment in New York's developmental disability service providers. <https://opwdd.ny.gov/news/opwdd-announces-850-million-dollar-investment-new-yorks-developmental-disability-service>

hours could risk services due to income-restrictive Supplemental Security Income.

New Yorkers with lifelong disabilities should not have to choose between supports and increased independence. Our service structures should support both.

We also know that earlier pathways matter. If young people are not connected to employment shortly after turning 22, the likelihood of achieving competitive employment declines significantly over time.

This is why New York should expand employer partnerships with 853 special education schools, invest in internships and training programs, and consider a statewide registry that connects employers with ready and supported talent.

Research shows people with an employment goal in their service plan are 4.5 times more likely to gain competitive employment.⁸ We should be setting these expectations earlier during Transition Services then reinforcing them across systems.

The sector must also share case studies. Continued partnership is needed among state agencies to bring attention to successful pilot programs. Nearly four years ago, AHRC Nassau opened Wheatley Farms & Arts Center, demonstrating how an inclusive social enterprise can create jobs and opportunities for more than 1,000 visitors. We would welcome the opportunity to share key learnings and hear from other providers. In this way, we can also show employers collective outcomes alongside resources such as tax credits and other incentives.

Another meaningful pathway to new jobs remains the Preferred Source Program, facilitated by the New York State Industries for the Disabled (NYSID) for 102 member organizations, including AHRC Nassau. Bringing attention to the importance of this program with state actors and sharing the positive outcomes of member agencies remains an important opportunity.

While challenges remain, there are more opportunities for stronger alignment, employer onboarding, and sustained investments, especially as it relates to the inclusion of people with disabilities who were formerly incarcerated.

⁸ DuBois, L., Bradley, V., & Isvan, N. (2024). An observational investigation of unemployment, underemployment, and competitive integrated employment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in 2021-2022. *Disability and Health Journal*, 18(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dhjo.2024.101620>

I urge elected officials considering these reforms, self-advocates, my colleagues in the field, and members of the business community to ensure this is the moment when the urgency of these needs is fully recognized and finally resolved.

Thank you for addressing this critical matter and AHRC Nassau remains available as a partner in creating solutions that last.