

California's Employment First Policy (AB 1041) **(Welfare and Institutions Code 4869)**

I. Executive Summary:

AB 1041, signed into law by Governor Brown in 2013, aims to align the state's disability service system with the principles of Employment First. The Lanterman Act, which governs the provision of services to individuals with developmental disabilities, was amended to incorporate and promote the Employment First Policy. This legislative move reinforces California's commitment to empower individuals with disabilities by prioritizing their employment in integrated settings. The policy prioritizes competitive, integrated employment as the first option for people with disabilities, emphasizing their right to pursue and maintain meaningful work.

II. Key Provisions:

Definition of Employment First: Employment First is defined as the philosophy that individuals with disabilities have the right to pursue competitive, integrated employment as their primary option. The policy emphasizes the elimination of barriers to employment and the provision of necessary supports to facilitate successful integration into the workforce.

Collaboration and Coordination: The legislation promotes collaboration among state agencies, regional centers, employers, and advocacy groups to create a coordinated approach to Employment First implementation.

Individualized Planning: Individual Program Plans (IPPs) must incorporate goals and strategies for competitive, integrated employment for individuals with developmental disabilities. The legislation underscores the importance of person-centered planning, acknowledging that employment goals should align with individual preferences, strengths, and aspirations.

Data Collection and Reporting: Agencies and regional centers are required to collect and report data on the employment outcomes of individuals with developmental disabilities. Regular reporting enhances transparency, accountability, and facilitates ongoing evaluation of the policy's impact.

III. Limitations:

- Limited resources for vocational training and supported employment services.
- Ongoing need for education and awareness regarding the benefits of inclusive employment, as well as the misconceptions around the impact of paid work on social security benefits.
- Addressing attitudinal barriers and prejudices within the workplace.

IV. Recommendations:

- Advocate for increased funding to support vocational training and supported employment services.
- Implement public awareness campaigns to promote the benefits of inclusive employment.
- Use data and feedback to make informed policy adjustments and improvements.

VI. Conclusion:

California's integration of the Employment First Policy into the Lanterman Act represents a commitment to advancing the rights and opportunities of individuals with disabilities. While limitations exist, ongoing collaboration, resource allocation, and policy evaluation will be vital in ensuring the successful implementation and impact of AB 1041.