Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities
Annual Report

Report Outline

Charge: The commission shall annually, not later than October 31, report the results of its findings and activities of the preceding fiscal year and its recommendations, which may include draft legislation, to the governor, the house and senate committees on ways and means, the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate, the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities and the joint committee on labor and workforce development.

I. Introduction

The Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is a 23-member, independent state agency with a broad charge to advance the cause of all persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth. Comprised of volunteer commissioners from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and socio-economic backgrounds, members draw from personal and professional experience to passionately promote their charge and serve all individuals with disabilities in Massachusetts.

The scope of the Commission's work includes examining ways to improve employment and transportation, assessing data and disparities, encourage inclusion of persons with disabilities as employees and vendors within the private and public sector workforce, assessing programs and practices in all state agencies as they affect persons with disabilities, advising the legislative and executive branches, and promoting and facilitating collaboration among local disability commissions, disability rights advocacy organizations and disability employment service providers.

The Commission is charged with filing an annual report of its findings and activities of the preceding fiscal year and its recommendations. The first meeting was held on July 21, 2021, after the previous fiscal year (FY2021) had ended. As such, this first report will briefly summarize the activities of the Commission from July 21, 2021 through October 29, 2021.

II. Commission Membership

Presented below is a list of commissioners:

Member	Organization	Title
Gyasi Burks-Abbott	LEND Program, Boston Children's Hospital/Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston	Self-Advocate Faculty
Charles Carr	Disability Policy Consortium	Legislative Liaison

Representative Gerard Cassidy	Massachusetts House of Representatives	State Representative
Representative Denise Garlick (Chair)	Massachusetts House of Representatives	State Representative
Nancy Garr-Colzie	Worcester Disability Commission / Center for Living & Working	Member / Board Chair
Representative Kay Khan	House of Representatives	State Representative
Andrew Levrault	Disabled Persons Protection Commission	Deputy General Counsel
Ann Lynch	Massachusetts Attorney General's Office	Assistant Attorney General
Felix Martinez		
Oswald Mondejar (Clerk)	Spaulding Rehabilitation Network (MGB)	Sr. Vice President of Mission & Advocacy
Representative Mathew Muratore	Massachusetts House of Representatives	State Representative
Bridget Murphy	Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin	Project Manager
Senator Patrick O'Connor	Massachusetts Senate	State Senator
Angela Ortiz	Massachusetts Pediatric Home Nursing Campaign	Parent & Founder
Kathy Petkauskos	University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School	Director, Work Without Limits
Nancy Rumbolt-Trzcinski	Massachusetts Statewide Independent Living Council	Chair/Member
Dan Shannon	MA Developmental Disabilities Council	Executive Director
Paul Spooner (Treasurer)	Metrowest Center for Independent Living	Executive Director
Kerry Thompson	Silent Rhythms Inc. / Disability Rights Fund	Executive Director / Senior Officer for Communications, Inclusion, and Analytics
Christopher White (Vice Chair)	Road To Responsibility, Inc. (RTR)	President/CEO
Liz Zelnick	Office of the Massachusetts State Treasurer	Deputy Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs

III. Legislative History

The permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities was established in Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020. Commonly known as the law enforcement reform legislation, this landmark law aimed to improve equity and racial justice in every corner of the Commonwealth. The commission's charge is broad and empowers members to access data, study and make policy recommendations, receive and spend funds, and endorse legislation to advance the cause of all persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth.

The Commission's story, however, begins in 2019 with the work of Representative Josh Cutler, who as House Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, led the Workability Subcommittee to develop recommendations to help remove barriers and promote disability hiring practices in the Commonwealth.

The report was the product of extensive research, including over 40 stakeholder meetings, 100 disability advocates, site visits to a dozen disability services providers and businesses, 39 pieces of public testimony and a public hearing at the State House. Among its recommendations was to establish a commission that "bridges both the Legislative and Executive branches and key stakeholder groups [to] ensure a permanent platform to the disability community and enhance communication."

The law enforcement reform legislation provided a vehicle to address equity for all people with disabilities. With the Commission now in place and funding secured, members have started meeting as they begin their important role in advocating for policy and legislation.

IV. Summary of Activity

As of filing of this report on October 29, 2021, the Commission has held 4 meetings. Complete meeting minutes are available in the appendix. The meetings have been broad in scope as the Commission begins its work and completes many necessary tasks required of new public commissions, such as trainings on the state ethics and open meeting laws.

Commissioners are building relationships by providing personal introductions and backgrounds on their connection to the disability community. Commissioners have a wide range of backgrounds and professions, including in the Legislature, executive branch, advocacy, provider, and through lived experience.

The Commission has elected an executive board:

- Chair: Representative Denise Garlick (State Representative for the 13th Norfolk District)
- Vice Chair: Chris White (President/CEO of Road To Responsibility)
- Treasurer: Paul Spooner (Executive Director of the Metrowest Center for Independent Living)
- Clerk: Oz Mondejar (Senior Vice President of Mission & Advocacy, Spaulding Rehabilitation Network (Mass General Brigham))

Members have engaged in a robust discussion on values statements to guide the Commission's work.

Additionally, the Commission invited Toni Wolf, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), to present on employment data and initiatives the MRC is undertaking to help individuals with disabilities achieve employment. This information is important as employment and the workforce is at the heart of the charge of the Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Lastly, the Legislature appropriated $150,000 for the Commission in a supplemental budget, Chapter 29 of the Acts of 2021.

V. Presentation of Data

The Commission will conduct in-depth data collection and analysis in the upcoming fiscal year. In the meantime, for this report, an overview of the most up-to-date data relating to persons with disabilities in Massachusetts is presented below.

In 2018, there were 6,902,149 individuals living in the community in Massachusetts, of which 791,132 (11.6%) were persons with disabilities.

Massachusetts Residents by Disability Category (ages 18-64 living in the community)

Disability Category	# of MA Residents	% of MA Residents	% of Disabled in MA
Cognitive Disability	319,796	4.7%	40.2%
Ambulatory disability	381,520	5.6%	47.9%
Independent Living Disability	301,231	4.4%	37.8%
Self-Care Disability	158,718	2.3%	19.9%
Hearing Disability	208,039	3.0%	26.1%
Vision Disability	128,651	1.9%	16.2%

MA & US Employment for Individuals with Disabilities (age 18-64, living in the community)

2018	# With Disability	# With Disability & Employed	% With Disability Who Are Employed
MA	384,133	146,757	38.2%
US	20,212,750	7,602,698	37.6%

- Note: Employment data is likely to have changed drastically since 2019 due to the COVID-19 public health crisis. How the pandemic impacted employment, and how we recover, is likely to be a focus of the Commission in the upcoming year.

SOURCE: The Census Bureau collects data on disability primarily through the American Community Survey (ACS) and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and not the US Census. The most recent ACS data is from 2019, posted online by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission using data from the 2019 Disability Statistics Compendium, developed by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Statistics and Demographics at the University of New Hampshire.

VI. Values Statement

The Commission engaged in a robust discussion on values statements to guide the work. Statements were initially adopted from *Work Matters: A Framework for States on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities*, published in 2017 by the Council of State Governments (CGS) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and adapted to the goals of the Commission.

This section will be updated after final review of values statements on 10/29/21.

VII. Goals for Next Year

Once the Commission has agreed to values statements to guide its work, members will turn to the charge of the commission. The following are broad topics that have garnered attention in the first few meetings, although the list is non-exhaustive and subject to change:

- Understand the differences in concerns and issues between various types of disabilities of individuals.
- Examine work issues and concerns, including employment opportunities and workforce needs.
- Evaluate access to transportation.
- Study benefits and benefit cutoffs.
- Investigate access to housing.

Appendix (Documents will be pasted below)

- Charge of the Commission (Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020)
- Meeting minutes
    - 7/21/21
    - 9/22/21
    - 10/20/21 (pending approval)

- 10/29/21 (pending approval)