# The Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities: Commission Business Meeting

## Agenda
**June 8, 2012**
**University of Central Florida – Fairwinds Alumni Center, Grand Ballroom**
**4000 Central Florida Boulevard**
**Building 126 North Gemini Boulevard**
**Orlando, FL 32816**
9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.
Conference Call Number: 1-888-808-6959
Conference Code: 7192614

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<td>I.</td>
<td>Call to Order</td>
<td>Chair Susanne Homant</td>
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<td>II.</td>
<td>Approval of the April 27, 2012 Minutes</td>
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<td>III.</td>
<td>Welcome from the Chair</td>
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<td>IV.</td>
<td>Welcome from University of Central Florida</td>
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| VI.   | Committee Updates:  
Access to Employment  
Employment Readiness/Services  
Employer Outreach | Committee Chairs:  
Marvin Tanck  
Steven Wallace  
Scot LaFerte' | 9:15-9:45 |
| VII.  | Demonstration on Assistive Technology | Dr. Jennifer Kent-Walsh, Director of the Atlantic Regional Assistive Technology Demonstration Center | 9:45-10:30 |
| VIII. | Discussion on Barriers to Employment for Persons with Disabilities | Chair Susanne Homant | 10:30-11:00 |
| IX.   | Discussion on Employer Hiring Practices | Commissioners & Invited Guests | 11:00-12:00 |
| X.    | Lunch/Committee Breakouts | Committees | 12:00-1:30 |
| XI.   | Students and Employees with Disabilities Discussions | Commissioners & Invited Guests | 1:30-2:15 |
| XII.  | Executive Director Report | David Darm | |
| XIII. | Committee Updates | Committee Chairs | |
| XIV.  | Public Comment | Public | 2:15-3:00 |
| XV.   | Next Steps | David Darm | |
| XVI.  | Adjournment | Chair Susanne Homant | |
When operating under Florida’s Government in the Sunshine Law, the Florida Supreme Court recognizes the importance of public participation in open meetings. The Commission provides that right of access at each public meeting and adheres to Chapter 286.011, Florida Statutes. A comment card for each speaker is required, and this limits public comment to five (5) minutes per speaker.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Chapter 286.26, Florida Statutes, persons in need of special accommodations to participate in the meeting (including an agenda) are asked to advise the agency at least five (5) days before the meeting by contacting David Darm at (850) 717-9433 or David.Darm@laspbs.state.fl.us. If you are hearing or speech impaired, please contact the agency using the Florida Relay Service, 1(800)955-8771 (TDD) or 1(800)955-8770 (Voice).

The meeting is subject to change upon the request of the chair.
Employment is our TOP Priority!

Success Stories
A Change in Duties Brings Out the Best in Zydre Palukaityte

Panama City (Area 1) – Zydre Palukaityte adjusts the books on the shelf, making sure that each one is in its proper place. On other days, you’ll find her straightening the clothes on the racks and helping customers. “The customers love her,” says Marcie Crumbley, Zydre’s supervisor at Goodwill. “It took a while to get her out of her shell because she’s really quiet, but once I put her on the floor, she was a totally different person.”

Zydre, who has Asperger’s, a form of autism, and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, has found her niche at Goodwill, and a good amount of the credit goes to Marcie. When she first started at Goodwill, her job was to sort through donations in the back room, and she was miserable. Marcie saw something different in Zydre, and knew that she was in the wrong department. “I think she felt closed in back there,” Marcie says. “But once I brought her out here and taught her how to tag and hang, how to pull books, and other duties, she was a totally different person.”

“I do wares (housewares) and clothes,” Zydre says. “I put hangers on the rack and count them, and I help in the store.” Marcie proudly says that Zydre can tell you if a book is out of place or in a section it’s not supposed to be in. “She’s never been late, never been out sick, I do love her.”

Zydre first came to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) when she was still in high school. Her VR Counselor Pamela Cramer talked to her about On-the-Job Training (OJT) and together they decided to try a six month OJT with Goodwill. With OJT, VR reimburses employers for the trainee’s salary, training costs, and any accommodations needed.

Pamela is also very proud of how far Zydre has come. “When Zydre first started, she was very shy and quiet, but now she’s more talkative and self-confident. Once the ‘real’ Zydre came out, she was instantly hired. OJT allowed Zydre time to get comfortable on the job and do her best.”

Once she finished her training, Goodwill hired her permanently. When asked how the training went and if she would be willing to train more VR customers, Marcie says, “Yes! She was excellent! And we need more.”

Business is Booming for Jim Knight

Gainesville (Area 2) – You may not recognize Jim Knight in person, but you’ve probably heard his voice on the radio or television. Jim has worked in radio for over 40 years, until Crohn’s Disease tried to derail his career. Crohn’s Disease is a disease of the digestive tract, where the immune system attacks the body, leading to severe pain and discomfort.

Jim’s health got so bad that he considered applying for Social Security disability. It was during that time that he heard about Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Because of his health problems, Jim was having trouble maintaining a regular job so he decided to launch his own company, Voice Over Talent. He had just started dabbling in the business when he found out about VR and met with VR Counselor Jessica Erkkila. Jessica realized that Jim would do well with his own company; he just needed some business training and the start up equipment to set up a studio in his home. That way Jim could monitor his health and work whenever he was feeling well enough to provide the voice work for different clients.

VR provided Jim with the necessary equipment for the studio and also provided self-employment and marketing training so he could expand Voice Over Talent. Now he is able to record and send the finished products to his clients over the internet. “VR made it possible for me to take my business to another level,” he says. “I’ve been able to reach more clients and obtain higher paying jobs, so really within the last few years I’ve started seeing the results from the help that VR has given me.”

Jessica is very proud of how far Jim has come in such a short time. “Jim has completed many small jobs and has also done some charity work that has taken his services globally,” she says. “Although he is not making a sustainable income yet, most of his accomplishments have occurred within the last six months since he has been out of the hospital.”

Now that his business is taking off, one of Jim’s goals is to work with VR on future projects. It would be his way of saying thank you to an organization that made it all possible. “I couldn’t maintain a job,” he said. “VR came along when I really needed it and made all of this possible for me.”
Determination Lands Gary Muniz a Job with Hyatt

Gary Muniz, who has a disability, starts his day early in order to get to his job at the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress on time. He rides his bike for miles until he reaches the nearest bus station. After a couple of transfers, he travels again on his bike until he reaches his destination. It's a journey that takes Gary almost three hours, but one he proudly makes. “Working at the Hyatt is amazing,” he says. “I’m so happy here.”

He began his career at the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress as part of the Hands On Education program. Through Hands On Educational Services, Gary received training in food service at the hotel. When he finished his training, unfortunately, there were no openings in the kitchen, so Gary moved to the Public Areas Department for further training, and later he was hired as a permanent employee.

Gary greets guests and makes sure the lobby, ballroom, and pool areas of the hotel are kept clean. Gary proudly talks about his first day at work, when he was asked to dump the trash, which gave him the chance to show how strong he is. “I showed my true strength,” he says. Gary loved his first day so much, he called his parents on the way home and told them he couldn’t wait to come back to work the next day.

“Gary’s determination makes him a success,” says Angelica Lugo, Gary’s Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor. Angelica said she was blown away by Gary’s dedication to find employment. VR provided Gary with counseling and guidance, as well as a job coach and placement services. For two years, Gary never let the economy or lack of jobs discourage him from his goal of finding a job. “Other people would give up if they had to ride a bicycle in the rain, but not Gary,” says Angelica. Whenever he can, Gary says thank you to VR for helping him find a job he loves. “VR was really great,” he says. “Thanks for everything.”

While his loyalty is just one of the qualities that make Gary a great employee, a strong work ethic and pride in their job are some of the many traits an employer can expect from a person with a disability. This is a resource that the Hyatt Hotels of Florida has realized, and they have a rich history of embracing people with disabilities. As a longtime partner with Hands On Educational Services, they have allowed 1,200 individuals with disabilities to train in their hotels during the past 14 years. In addition, Hyatt has hired more than 120 people with disabilities.

Customer has 30-year relationship with VR

Tampa (Area 4) – The lifelong relationship one has with a friend or loved one is often the basis of great novels and movies. However, something can also be said about the relationship David Gondreau and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) have sustained over the years. David, who became a person with quadriplegia at the age of 17, has been a VR customer off and on for more than 30 years. “VR has been with me the whole time,” he says. “Without the assistance I’ve gotten, I wouldn’t have been able to work.”

David has worked for more than 27 years as a System Analyst at TECO Tampa Electric. This was made possible through his years of working with VR. “Without VR, I wouldn’t be where I am right now,” he says. “They always told me that it’s up to me to do it; and they’re here to help.”

While transitioning out of rehab after his accident, David met with a VR counselor who encouraged him to complete high school and continue on to college. VR helped David with transportation to and from school and paid his tuition. He landed an internship with TECO and has been working there ever since.

At TECO, David manages computer systems for the Human Resources, Electrical, and Training Departments, as well as the corporate and employee directories. He is also responsible for handling the security and electric utility systems. It is a job that requires him to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It also requires him to stay on top of the latest advancements in his field. “I can do all of these things because I was able to get the assistance, equipment, and training from VR,” he says.

VR is more than a one-time service agency; it also helps individuals with disabilities maintain employment. David recently came back to VR because his power chair was not working very well, and he needed a new one. He also needed modifications to his van, and a home work station was set up with a modified computer that included special software so he could work from home.

David is happy that VR provides what he calls a “level playing field,” so he can keep up with all of his non-disabled co-workers. “Because of everything VR has done for me, the sky’s the limit in career capabilities and possibilities.”
**Perseverance Pays Off for Two Young People with Disabilities**

Miami (Area 6) – Dedication and persistence are adjectives that describe many people with disabilities who come to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) looking for employment. But nothing tested more true for customers Jennifer Huertas and Carl Meeks, who were VR customers for several years before they were hired by Sunset Feed three months ago. It was a process that showed just how resilient and patient they could be. “They wanted to be self-sufficient, and that’s why they hung in there,” says VR Consultant Ruby Bethea, who handled their case.

When they came to VR, Jennifer and Carl were introduced to Community Habilitation Center (CHC) where they met Job Coach Elizabeth Herrera. Carl and Jennifer both have mental disabilities, so VR and CHC worked on providing not only guidance and counseling, but also job skills training, coaching, job placement, and supported employment.

After working with Jennifer and Carl for several months, Elizabeth took them on a job interview at Sunset Feed. Sunset Feed was planning to hire only one employee, but they fell in love with both Jennifer and Carl, and so they hired them both. Elizabeth believes it is a perfect fit for everyone involved. “The people at Sunset Feed are just amazing,” she says. At Sunset Feed, Jennifer works inside the store, keeping the shelves clean and restocked. Outside in the warehouse, Carl manages the bags of seed, filling five and ten pounds bags, as requested.

Stacy Frisch, Bookkeeper at Sunset Feed, also sees the benefits of hiring Carl and Jennifer. “They are always happy to be here,” she says. “Jennifer is really friendly and wants to socialize with everybody. And Carl’s very diligent; he goes straight to his department and starts working right away.” Stacy, who didn’t know about VR before she was introduced to Jennifer and Carl, says that the experience has opened her eyes and made her willing to hire other employees with disabilities. “It’s been a positive experience so far,” she says.

Not only are Jennifer and Carl happy to be employed, everyone around them can see the positive changes in their personalities. “A huge part of their success was their families,” says Ruby. “They even took pictures of their first check and went out to celebrate.”

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**Vocational Rehabilitation Gives Marc New Hope**

Ft. Lauderdale (Area 5) – It was a case of mistaken identity that left Marc Williams with Post Traumatic Stress and Major Depressive Disorders. Marc is not shy about sharing his story. Driving home one evening, Marc pulled into a local park to place a phone call, and, unknowingly, was caught in the middle of a drug sting operation. When he stepped out of the car, he was attacked by law enforcement. “They grabbed me by my neck and head, and slammed my face and head on the concrete,” Marc recalls.

Before he knew what was happening, he heard the officers say, “wrong guy.” As quickly as they came, they were gone, leaving Marc on the ground bleeding. Months later, Marc still struggled to make sense of what happened, as he watched his life spiral out of control. Marc, who had been studying forensic psychology in college, had recently been accepted into the United States Army. Suddenly, he lost his house, his car and was no longer able to serve in the military. “I lost everything,” Marc says. “I was on the brink.”

After this traumatic event, Marc struggled to find his footing. Because he was unable to join the army as planned, his depression became even worse. His local commissioner referred him to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and VR Counselors Lynn Rupe and Kaleatha Downing helped Marc find the stability he needed.

“When I first met him, Marc was very fragile,” says Lynn. “If we weren’t in his life at the time that we were, he would have unraveled.” Lynn and VR worked to give Marc balance through mental restoration, psychotherapy, guidance and the service that meant the most to Marc, counseling. As he continued to focus on getting well, Marc found employment at A.R.E. Utility Construction. “They are so wonderful with him, as far as being accommodating,” says Lynn.

“Marc always has a smile on his face,” says Steve Wergheimer, A.R.E.’s CEO. “He gets along with everyone.” Marc works in the construction yard, operating equipment. He also washes, paints and makes minor repairs to the equipment. Steve understands the Marc is still trying to get well and says that he is improving every day. Marc has been employed at A.R.E for more than two years now, and says that frankly VR saved his life. His goal is to continue to make progress, and he is grateful to VR for getting him on the right track. “VR changed my life, because now I’m on the road to where I need to be,” he says. “I have the tools, and I have the resources, and I really appreciate it.”
MEETING DATE: June 8, 2012

AGENDA ITEM:

IX. Discussion on Employer Hiring Practices

STAFF ANALYSIS:

During the inaugural meeting on January 6, 2012, Lieutenant Governor Jennifer Carroll encouraged the commission to “go out and seek information from employers as to what they see could be a benefit of hiring individuals with disabilities, or what they see as barriers.” The commission will accomplish this charge by holding meetings in metropolitan cities around the state to seek the input of employers within those communities. We have invited employers in the Orlando area to participate in a discussion on their hiring practices and the barriers they have experienced in employing persons with disabilities (PWD).

The discussion is designed to be a dialogue among commissioners and employers, where the commission can learn about the most pressing issues facing businesses. This discussion will help the commission develop policy recommendations that consider the needs and concerns of employers. Here are some questions and issues to consider during these discussions:

- What are some of the factors you consider when hiring an applicant for a position? What types of candidate preparation are necessary for an individual to be successful in the position?
- What types of strategies have you used to diversify your workforce? What have you learned from that process?
- Do you work with (or have you been contacted by) community service providers who serve PWD? If so, what has been your experience, especially in regards to understanding your business needs?
- Has your company utilized assistive services and/or technology for employees? If so, what has been your experience? How interested would you be in learning more about these resources? Where would you look?
- Does your company participate in internship programs? If so, why? What are the benefits to your company? How do you think these programs benefit the interns?
- Do you partner with organizations, agencies, or schools to facilitate work experience programs (i.e. internships, mentorships, on-the-job training programs, etc.)? If so, how do you see them ensuring the effectiveness of these programs?

ATTACHMENTS:
Invitation to Attend June 8, 2012 Governor’s Commission Meeting

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION:

The purpose of this discussion is to gather invaluable information from employers that will help the commission develop public policy recommendations.

David Darm  
Executive Director  
June 8, 2012
MEETING DATE: June 8, 2012

AGENDA ITEM:

VII. Demonstration on Assistive Technology

STAFF ANALYSIS:

The Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) is a non-profit organization that provides Floridians with disabilities of all ages with access to assistive technology. FAAST is funded by the United States Rehabilitation Services Administration and the Florida Department of Education Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Assistive Technology (AT) is any item that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. AT can be bought, improvised or modified. Some examples of AT are speech communication devices, computer access tools and software, assistive devices for hearing and vision, aids for daily living and mobility equipment.

During the March 2, 2012 meeting, Steve Howells, Executive Director of FAAST, provided the commission with a presentation and demonstration on the various assistive services and technologies that are available through this organization. The commission expressed interest in receiving another AT demonstration. The FAAST Atlantic Regional Assistive Technology Demonstration Center is located in the University of Central Florida Communications Disorders Clinic. Dr. Jennifer Kent-Walsh is the director of the center, and will providing the commission with a demonstration on the AT services and devices offered by the center.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION:

This item is for information purposes only.

David Darm
Executive Director
June 8, 2012
MEETING DATE: June 8, 2012

AGENDA ITEM:

II. Approval of the April 27, 2012 Minutes

STAFF ANALYSIS:

Pursuant to the provisions of the Florida Government in the Sunshine Law, the commission is required to record the minutes of each meeting and have that information available to the public. The commission convened a business meeting on April 27, 2012, in Jacksonville, Florida. The minutes of that meeting are attached to this document.

ATTACHMENTS:

April 27, 2012 Minutes

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION:

The commission should approve the April 27, 2012 minutes.

David Darm
Executive Director
June 8, 2012
Meeting Summary

Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities
Commission Business Meeting

Florida State College at Jacksonville – Advanced Technology Center  April 27, 2012
401 W. State Street, T140/141  10:00 AM
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

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<td>Jack Felts</td>
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<td>Mike Hansen</td>
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<td>Suzy Hutcheson</td>
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<td>Robert Lynn</td>
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<td>Julio Suárez</td>
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<td>Steven Wallace</td>
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Others Present
David Darm, Nancy Bootot, Lisa Rountree, Wayne Jennings, Ana Saint-Fort, Sean Pozin, Leigh Forrester, Kathleen Miller, Chris Oakley, Dr. Tommie Broach, Shirley Johns, Darrell Lewis.

Call to Order
Chair Homant called the meeting to order. David Darm called the roll. A quorum was present. The agenda was approved with revisions.

Welcome from Florida State College at Jacksonville
Dr. Steven Wallace, president of Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ), welcomed the commission to the Advanced Technology Center (ATC). He stated the ATC was designed to be a flex lab – a transitional space for companies that are locating to Jacksonville and creating new operations. He stated this is a massive technology infrastructure, and was his first project when he came to FSCJ fourteen years ago. This is the only center that was designed to address regional economic development strategies.

Approval of the March 2, 2012 Minutes
Chair Homant discussed the minutes of the March 2, 2012 commission meeting.
ACTION TAKEN: Commissioner Landsberg moved and Commissioner Hutcheson seconded to approve the March 2, 2012 minutes. The motion carried unanimously.

Remarks from the Chair

Chair Homant discussed housekeeping items for the day's agenda. She informed the members the Access to Employment Opportunities Subcommittee would not meet that day.

Chair Homant stated one of the challenges this commission faces is getting feedback from employers on the barriers and benefits to hiring, interviewing, and retaining persons with disabilities. She wanted the members to keep thinking about how the commission can reach out to employers and address these barriers.

Chair Homant provided the commission with her background. She grew up in a home with family members with disabilities. She said her biggest inspiration was her brother. When he was three years old, Chair Homant’s brother contracted polio (six months before the vaccine was invented). She said he is currently an attorney, married, has five children, and six grandchildren. Although he is physically disabled from the waist down, she said her brother is a trained scuba diver. From her experience, Chair Homant stated persons with disabilities can succeed despite their disability. She asked her brother how he got his first job after he finished law school. He stated he just applied to the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan; he said the city was looking for an attorney to run the municipal golf course because the employees were on strike. Chair Homant said her brother has two children with disabilities, and he indicated that they are facing bigger challenges in finding employment than he did. Chair Homant concluded people with disabilities today face a different set of challenges than her brother did in competing in the jobs market. She encouraged the members to think about what are the policy issues that impact employment.

Chair Homant asked the members to introduce themselves.

Discussion on Employer Hiring Practices and Barriers to Employment

Mr. Darm explained the purpose of this discussion. During the first commission meeting on January 6, 2012, Lieutenant Governor Jennifer Carroll encouraged the commission to reach out and seek input from employers in the state on the barriers and benefits they have experienced in hiring persons with disabilities. Mr. Darm said this is the first opportunity for the commission to hear from employers. Prior to this meeting, Mr. Darm invited several employers in the Jacksonville area to participate in an informal discussion with the commission. He said the goal is to understand the factors that employers consider when hiring a person with a disability, what are some of the barriers they have experienced, what their experience has been with working with state agencies, etc. Mr. Darm invited members in the audience who represent employers to come to the table if they wish to participate in this discussion. Mr. Darm introduced
Chris Oakley, who represents the Jacksonville branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and is the president of the First Coast Business Leadership Network (FCBLN), to begin the discussion.

Mr. Oakley provided the commission with handouts. Mr. Oakley stated the issues the commission has discussed are the same issues that the FCBLN is trying to address. The FCBLN is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization formed in 2006. Business Leadership Networks throughout the nation use a business-to-business strategy to promote the employment of people with disabilities. The FCBLN is led by employers like Florida Blue (formerly Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida), CSX, Jacksonville Aviation Authority, and Mayo Clinic. The FCBLN engages community providers through the Job Opportunities Consortium.

The FCBLN recognizes people with disabilities are one of the largest minority groups in the state. Mr. Oakley stated there are thousands of prospective employees with disabilities looking for jobs in the Jacksonville area. He also stated that organizations are seeking talent. Mr. Oakley said the role of the FCBLN is to raise awareness and remove barriers to employing people with disabilities through training and technical assistance to employers. He said this is consistent with the mission of the national Business Leadership Network (USBLN), which is to embrace the full inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor force and marketplace.

Mr. Oakley discussed some of the services offered by the FCBLN. The FCBLN facilitates educational and interactive quarterly meetings. Part of the FCBLN’s strategy is to feature business best practices at its meetings. Mr. Oakley provided some examples of their educational programs: understanding the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act; disability etiquette in the workplace; assistive technology and accommodations; etc. The FCBLN also provides job placement through grants to fund internships for people with disabilities. The FCBLN was awarded an internship grant from The Able Trust. Mr. Oakley stated the internship program provided individuals with disabilities an opportunity to gain work experience to increase their value to prospective employers and gave employers a no-risk opportunity to engage talented people with disabilities in their workplaces. The FCBLN placed 25 interns in businesses in Jacksonville, which included a wide variety of jobs. Of the 25 interns, seven were hired as full time employees at the completion of the internship.

The FCBLN members serve on Corporate Dialogue panels, which Mr. Oakley said was designed to improve the “Employment Supply Chain” (talking to employers on what is and is not working). The panels assist the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) staff and private service providers helping people with disabilities to become employed better understand the demand side of their business. The panelists focus on explaining what employers need from service providers and candidates to create a successful employment relationship.

Mr. Oakley provided the commission with some of the feedback the FCBLN is receiving from businesses. In regards to business hiring practices and expanding the pool of
talent, Mr. Oakley quoted the USBLN: “Businesses join BLN affiliates to learn how to expand their diversity recruiting efforts to include people with disabilities – not as a social model but as a business case to recruit talent and better serve their customers.” In regards to employer feedback on service providers, Mr. Oakley shared some of the issues: it is important to understand the business; understand the skills and responsibilities needed with the job; match talents to employer needs; and be responsive. In regards to candidate preparation, he stated: the resumes and applications need to be high quality; the applicant needs to be competitive; the individual needs to be professional; the applicant should understand interview skills; and there needs to be a level of responsiveness and follow-up. In regards to those hired, Mr. Oakley stated employers expect new hires to add value and to be successful, and assistance after the hire from service providers will vary based on the relationship between the employer and employee.

Mr. Oakley provided a summary of the employer feedback. He provided a chart of the Florida Monthly Payroll. He stated post recession job creation is tight, but it is happening. Mr. Oakley said low-skilled jobs are rapidly disappearing, which means candidate training and preparation is essential. Mr. Oakley emphasized the bottom-line is employers want the best candidate for the position.

Chair Homant thanked Mr. Oakley for the work of the First Coast Business Leadership Network. She informed the commission that the members of the FCBLN are all volunteering their own time to accomplish these goals. She encouraged the members to check out the USBLN website for more information about these organizations. She informed the commission that the USBLN will be hosting its annual conference this year in Orlando during the first week of October.

Mr. Darm asked Mr. Oakley to share his experience in partnering with businesses to facilitate internships. Mr. Oakley said internships are very attractive for employers in the current economic environment. He said the FCBLN internship program (through The Able Trust grant) was attractive to employers because it was a paid opportunity for interns. He said they first went to the members of the FCBLN before reaching out to other businesses. He said this was a great opportunity for some businesses to claim diversity in their workforce. Mr. Oakley stated the FCBLN did not market the program as a “FCBLN-sponsored” initiative; rather, they reached out to employers to see if the FCBLN could meet a business need by placing an individual in their workplace for a short period of time. He said some of the managers and individuals who interacted with the intern did not realize the individual had a disability. For other interns who indicated they needed certain accommodations, Mr. Oakley said it provided an opportunity for employers to learn about the resources that are available in their community. He said they recognized that many individuals would not be immediately placed in full-time jobs through the internship program due to the economic circumstances; however, he said it has been more successful than they anticipated.

Commissioner Hutcheson asked Mr. Oakley if the FCBLN provides training opportunities to service providers in the community. Mr. Oakley said not yet. He said the
next step of communicating to service providers is important. If a service provider were to strike out the first time, Mr. Oakley said the service provider would likely not have another opportunity with that business. He said he has seen the frustration within the community that providers feel that they are not included in the “inner circle.” So, Mr. Oakley said he would like to improve that communication.

Commissioner Suárez followed-up with Mr. Oakley’s comment on the scenario of the “inner circle.” He stated he was recently involved with a project where his company (Darden Restaurants) partnered with a nonprofit organization on a matter not related to disabilities; he said he quickly learned that his business colleagues were used to working with vendors and other business-minded companies who were very responsive. He said this is the environment of the business community and the expectation. He said some nonprofit organizations do not work this way. He clarified that he was not discrediting nonprofit organizations, but said the expectations may be different. Commissioner Suárez said he learned that he should serve as a mediator between his business colleagues and the nonprofit organization to improve the communications. He stated that he was not trying to justify these scenarios, but wanted to explain the reasons these scenarios may take place between employers and community service providers.

Chair Homant responded to Commissioner Suárez that she has heard many businesses indicate that issue. She provided the scenario that her colleagues in the retail industry have told her: “If I am going to have a bake sale next Saturday and need four additional people to work that day, I am not going to wait for the individuals to be trained.” She said this goes back to Mr. Oakley’s comment that low-skilled jobs are disappearing. Chair Homant said the Florida Chamber of Commerce and the leadership in the Florida College System are working hard to develop talent supply and education. Chair Homant said there is an emphasis in the jobs market being placed on the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. So, she stated persons with disabilities need to be trained and prepared in order to compete for the jobs of the future. Chair Homant recognized Kathleen Miller from Florida Blue to participate in the discussion.

Ms. Miller introduced herself and provided her background. Prior to Florida Blue, Ms. Miller worked for Kelly Services. Ms. Miller said her background has given her both the perspective of the staffing agency and the human resources manager. She is also on the board of the First Coast Business Leadership Network, and is familiar with the internship program. When she was with Kelly Services, Ms. Miller helped facilitate the payroll for the internships because companies wanted an intern but could not afford it.

Ms. Miller agreed with the comments that there is a translation of expectations that needs to take place between employers and service provider organizations. She has seen a large gap between the two parties. She provided an example where she has an internship opportunity available with Florida Blue, but her BLN contact made at least nine phone calls and could not provide the first resume until five weeks later. Ms. Miller said they expect a delay in responses, but they sometimes do not get a response at all. She said Florida Blue has been able to address that problem by developing
partnerships with peer companies. She said the advantage to being a member of the BLN is employers are able to participate in peer-to-peer networks, which helps employers navigate the obstacles of the system (peers can help each other to break down those barriers). Ms. Miller stated employers are willing to participate in these types of activities, but it is a challenge for some employers to share best practices with each other.

Ms. Miller also shared her thoughts on the future of the workforce. She stated approximately 15% of people in the workforce are considered to be non-regular employees (such as contracted employees, consultants, temps, etc.). She said it is expected within 10 years that 1 out of every 4 individuals in the workforce will be non-regular employees. Although this presents a challenge, Ms. Miller said this also presents an opportunity. Along with internship opportunities, Ms. Miller stated temporary and contract jobs are good for persons with disabilities because it is a “try before you buy” opportunity, short-term, start slow, allows the employer to try the individual out before committing, and provides the individual an opportunity to gain valuable skills. She said this would be a great entry for people with disabilities and others who are trying to compete in the jobs market (such as college graduates). Ms. Miller said the challenge will be how to make this work. By design of employing persons with disabilities, these jobs are not designed for non-regular work. For example, Florida Blue had someone working for the company through Kelly Services. Ms. Miller said the individual was doing a good job, but the company could not hire the individual as a regular employee. She said the company tried to find a temporary position for the individual, but he had to quit because if he took the position he would risk losing his medical coverage. Ms. Miller anticipated non-regular employees will continue to grow. She said this could bring about an opportunity for persons with disabilities if the state can develop strategies that remove some of these barriers (such as the loss of medical benefits) so more individuals can take advantage of this opportunity.

Commissioner Wallace asked the guests to share their thoughts on what they consider successful models of paid and unpaid internships. Ms. Miller said paid is generally preferred over unpaid; however, she said unpaid internships present the opportunity for the candidate to learn job skills. From the employer perspective, Ms. Miller said part of the attraction is the ease of making it work. She stated the question would be: “what are the opportunities for people that are willing to do a job on an unpaid basis?” Regardless of paid versus unpaid, she said the keeping is how many hoops the employer has to go through to take advantage of an internship opportunity. She said that is why so many of the internships through the FCBLN have worked so well: employers do not have to jump through many hoops to participate. Mr. Oakley said he was bias toward paid internships, particularly for this group. He said this is a special group of people that has (for various reasons) had more challenges getting their foot in the door.

Mr. Oakley discussed another major barrier to employment is transportation. He said it is a barrier for many who have low-to-moderate incomes, but especially for persons with disabilities who cannot drive. He said if the job requires the individual to be somewhere, then there may be opportunities for improvement for transportation to be made
available. Mr. Oakley said some employers offer Alternate Workplace Arrangements (AWA) to address such barriers (for example, an employee can work from home if the individual has transportation issues).

Chair Homant appreciated Mr. Oakley bringing that issue to the commission. She encouraged the commissioners to think about the whole depth and breadth of the barriers they may identify (transportation, loss of medical benefits, etc.). She also stated that there are no “be-all-end-all” solutions to these barriers (i.e. not all persons with disabilities need transportation services, etc.).

Commissioner Hansen asked the guests if they feel employers treat persons with disabilities differently than their other employees, or do they approach these individuals the same way they approach other employees. Commissioner Hansen gave an example where Governor Rick Scott invited Jack Welch (former CEO of General Electric) to meet with his leadership team. He said Mr. Welch encourages executives to meet with their HR managers everyday because the people the executive hires are the most important decisions made for a company. He asked the guests if their companies use a similar approach, and if persons with disabilities are included in that approach. Ms. Miller said her company has not taken the approach of treating individuals with disabilities differently; she said they are trying to level the playing field for these individuals. Ms. Miller stated these challenges are similar to the issues with Generation Y or women who return to work after taking several years off to raise children. She believed persons with disabilities experience “playing field barriers” (i.e. responsiveness; understanding how to apply to a job; building a resume to compete; etc.). She said employers involved in the BLN believe this is an untapped pool of talent, so they are participating in these activities because they want to acquire this talent in their workforces.

Commissioner Hutcheson said her agency has been able to participate in training opportunities offered by large employers. She learned that large employers provide many internship programs. Commissioner Hutcheson agreed with the panel that the problem on the service provision side is that provider organizations do not usually think like a business, and that they are not as responsive as the business community.

Mr. Oakley said most employers participate in the BLN to broaden their reach to a wider pool of candidates that could potentially be successful in their organization. One of the highlights of the FCBLN, Mr. Oakley said they offer an assessment process for employers to be designated as a “disability friendly” business. He said the intent of this designation is to bring more customers in the door.

Chair Homant said she is hearing two types of barriers: 1) some policies that might need to change, and 2) some perceptions need to be changed. As the commission comes up with recommendations to the Governor, Chair Homant asked the guests if they feel the commission should focus more on the policy barriers or the perception barriers. Mr. Oakley said his initial thoughts were to focus on policy changes that could make this process easier for employers. He said he thinks perception changes are
already happening (most people have a personal experience with individuals with disabilities, such as a family member or friend). He said as society becomes more inclusive, perceptions will gradually improve.

Commissioner Lynn asked Commissioner Hansen if the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) assists its clients to participate in internship or work experience programs with an employer. Commissioner Hansen said APD provides supported employment opportunities; he asked Nancy Bootot from APD to provide more information. Ms. Bootot said APD can support internship opportunities for clients by paying for the supports and services. However, she said the funding source can present difficulties. She said there are federal guidelines that limit the types of jobs APD can provide to clients (such as temp positions). Ms. Bootot said the federal government places an emphasis on long-term placement, which can be difficult to support internships and temporary positions because they are not long-term. Commissioner Lynn asked Ms. Bootot if APD has funding available to provide internships or work experience programs to its clients. Ms. Bootot said yes and no. She said Medicaid is the payer of last resort, which means the agency has to go through other sources of funding (such as DVR). Those agencies have funding limitations. She said some support coordinators can be creative and get clients into internships.

Commissioner Lynn asked Wayne Jennings from the Division of Blind Services (DBS) if the division offers internship and work experience programs. Mr. Jennings said yes. He said DBS provides on-the-job training (OJT) and work experience opportunities. DBS funds up to six months of the program. Mr. Jennings introduced Ana Saint-Fort from the Tallahassee branch of DBS, who provides these services on a daily basis. He said DBS does not require a specific job or workplace setting for its clients; rather, the division tries to accommodate the clients’ vocational interests. He said DBS looks at each client individually relating to the job placement. In the OJT program, DBS reimburses the salary for the employer. In the work experience program, DBS pays a stipend that is below minimum wage in order to protect the client’s benefits. Commissioner Lynn asked what is DBS’s funding source to support these programs. Mr. Jennings said most of the funding is federal (with state match). Commissioner Lynn asked if DBS funds training opportunities for its clients by reimbursing the employer. Mr. Jennings said yes; DBS reimburses the employer to support the client.

Commissioner Lynn said he has a deep appreciation for internships. He said this is not a new concept. When he was in high school, Commissioner Lynn said the school offered a program called diversified cooperative education, which offered similar experience. He said his son is a medical doctor, who was trained in an internship program. Commissioner Lynn said the commission may want to support the Division of Blind Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, and other agencies that serve people with disabilities to explore internship programs for their clients.

Commissioner Suárez said Commissioner Lynn’s questions were enlightening. He wanted to know if businesses are taking advantage of these resources (such as DBS,
DVR, etc.). He asked Mr. Jennings if DBS funds these programs on a regular basis. Mr. Jennings said yes. Commissioner Suárez then asked (of DBS’s budget that is allocated to fund these programs) what percentage of that budget is utilized on a yearly basis. Mr. Jennings said they do not budget specifically for that. He said DBS works with its clients on a case-by-case basis (the division bases it on client need). Mr. Jennings said DBS’s budget is allocated two ways: 1) contracted services for client training (i.e. mobility training, communication skills, independent living, etc.); 2) case service dollars (money allocated through the districts to purchase services not under contract). Commissioner Suárez asked Mr. Jennings what is keeping DBS from placing more people in OJT and work experience opportunities: is it a lack of budget to run the program, or is there not enough demand from the employers? Mr. Jennings said they have not recently placed as many clients because of the impact of the economy, which has impacted DVR’s programs as well. Commissioner Suárez asked if DBS were to get an increase of requests from employers to participate in these programs, would DBS be able to place more clients. Mr. Jennings said yes. He said they have contracts with more agencies to assist in this effort.

Chair Homant invited Lisa Rountree from State Farm to participate in the conversation. Ms. Rountree commented on Chair Homant’s questions regarding policies versus perceptions. Ms. Rountree said she believed the emphasis should be on changing perceptions through education. She said employers could benefit from learning about the availability of resources and services (such as the programs offered by the Division of Blind Services). Ms. Rountree said many employers are not aware of those resources.

Chair Homant believed both policies and perceptions need to be addressed; she said they were trying to get an understanding on the areas that need the most attention. She said perceptions have changed over time. There was a time when the perception of persons with disabilities was that many belonged in an institution. Since persons with disabilities have become mainstreamed, Chair Homant said they have been given more opportunities. Chair Homant believes that there is still a prevalent perception that most persons with disabilities are in entry-level jobs. When the commission develops recommendations, Chair Homant suggested the commission consider addressing the policy and perception change.

Chair Homant invited Dr. Tommie Broach, who is David Darm’s mother and the founder of a not-for-profit school for special needs students in Jacksonville called “The Broach School,” to participate in the discussion. Dr. Broach said her school has been serving students with disabilities for over forty years, and has a vested interest in this cause. She spoke to the commission as an employer (her school has approximately a hundred employees). Dr. Broach said she has hired individuals with disabilities; however, it occurred to her that her school has not actively recruited persons with disabilities. She said it would be important for her students to see other individuals with disabilities who are employed by her school. She said she does not know who to call to recruit people with disabilities. Dr. Broach believed other small employers are experiencing the same dilemma. She stated many people with disabilities have a strong work ethic that makes
them very competitive in the jobs market (she used the example of her son’s experience). Dr. Broach said there is a shared frustration to serve these individuals because they do not know who to contact for services.

Dr. Broach made some suggestions to the commission. Dr. Broach said there are a lot of ads on television encouraging employers to hire returning soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan, which many employers are interested in participating in this initiative. She recommended the commission look at ways the state could highlight the importance of hiring persons with disabilities and wounded warriors as great employees. Dr. Broach also suggested the commission look at developing a centralized organization where employers and others can call to learn about the resources and programs that are available through the state (grants, internships, etc.).

Commissioner Suárez said he was interested in Dr. Broach’s remark that it did not occur to her as an employer to actively recruit persons with disabilities. Commissioner Suárez asked if it is safe to say that her company is not regularly contacted by service provider organizations. Dr. Broach said she has never been contacted. She noted that her school has some academic requirements to be employed; however, she said she would not have known about Division of Blind Services if she did not have a son who was legally blind. Kathleen Miller and Lisa Rountree indicated they have experienced the same challenges. Commissioner Suárez, who represents Darden Restaurants in Orlando, said he has experienced the opposite scenario: his company is being contacted by numerous organizations in the area, and he said it is very overwhelming. Commissioner LaFerte’, who represents Universal Orlando, has experienced that as well. Dr. Broach clarified even if she was contacted, timing would be an issue (she may not have a position available at the moment if she was contacted by an organization). However, she stated knowing who to call is important because she could contact that organization when a position does become available.

Mr. Darm said one of the purposes of this meeting was to get the perspective of small employers as well as the large employer. He said this would help the commission understand the various challenges employers throughout the state experience, and will help the commission develop its recommendations.

Vice-Chair Wallace recognized Sean Pozin to speak to the commission. Mr. Pozin informed the commission that he is developing a website called AbleAdvisor.com. He said it is designed to make a business case to employers on why they should hire persons with disabilities. He also said the website provides information on some of the organizations in the area (such as the ARC of Jacksonville, Centers for Independent Living, etc.). Finally, the website provides information about the supports and accommodations available to persons with disabilities. Mr. Pozin participated in the FCBLN internship program with CSX. He said he learned from the CEO of CSX that he took the top-down approach to make a change within the company. Mr. Pozin said the CEO of CSX made a change because he noticed the statistical advantages for the company to actively hire people with disabilities. He said the company had to figure out the resources for itself (the company was not approached by organizations like the
Mayor’s Disability Council). Mr. Pozin said this is a barrier that he is trying to address with his website.

Ms. Miller said if some employers are being overly contacted while others are not being contacted at all, she wanted to know if this is a part of a perception problem on both sides. For example, the business may perceive the placement agency may only have clients with low-skills to work for the company; on the other hand, the placement agency may not know what are the skills required for the jobs offered by the company. Ms. Miller said this has been her experience. She suggested the commission look at the level of skill that would be required for positions when looking at developing a single-point of contact for employers.

The commission recessed for lunch.

**Executive Director Report**

Chair Homant called the meeting back to order. She discussed the schedule for the afternoon.

Mr. Darm said this was the first opportunity for the commission to actively seek employer input on the barriers and benefits to hiring persons with disabilities. Mr. Darm believed it was a successful discussion. He said he faced a few challenges to generate interest and get people to come out to this meeting. He said the commission has two major tasks to accomplish: 1) develop a report of recommendations to submit to the Governor by July 26; and 2) seek employer input. He asked the members to reach out to their contacts in the business community to generate more interest for future meetings. He also asked the members to provide him direction on how to better communicate the meetings. Mr. Darm said networking is very important in getting people to be more willing to participate in these discussions.

Commissioner Wallace said the commission needs to be focused on developing its recommendations because the deadline is fast approaching. He said the commission is in a learning phase. Commissioner Wallace wanted to leave this meeting with a strong consensus on a focused framework for the report, which will inform the conversation with employers. He stated the challenge is the employer community is enormous and diverse, and there are hundreds of potential topics to discuss (which the commission does not have time to explore). He stated the committees’ work on recommendations should determine the type of conversation the commission can have with employers.

Chair Homant asked Commissioner Wallace if he had a couple of critical questions that the commission could ask of employers to help steer the conversation (e.g. how can the commission make it easier for employers to diversify their workforce?). Commissioner Wallace said he had some questions in mind, but first wanted to share his ideas with his committee (Employment Readiness and Services Subcommittee) before presenting them to the commission. He said he is sensing a direction on where the committee wants to go.
Chair Homant asked Mr. Darm about the location of the next commission meeting. Mr. Darm said the commission is looking at holding its next meeting in the Central Florida area, either Orlando or Tampa. He stated he would like the meeting location to be at a college or university. He asked the members if they had a preference; the members said Orlando. Mr. Darm said he would reach out to the University of Central Florida for the next meeting. He asked the members to provide him with their contacts to invite to the next meeting.

Chair Homant informed the members that the first report will be concise and probably have about three solid recommendations. She wanted the first report to make a good impression for the Governor and his staff.

Chair Homant asked Mr. Darm to discuss the idea for the commission to receive another assistive technology demonstration. Mr. Darm stated the Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) provided a great assistive technology demonstration at the previous meeting (March 2, 2012); however, due to time constraints, the commission did not learn enough about these resources. Mr. Darm said FAAST has a regional demonstration center based at the University of Central Florida (UCF). If Mr. Darm could arrange the next meeting to be held at UCF, he asked the members if they would be interested in receiving another assistive technology demonstration. The members concurred. Mr. Darm said this would not only benefit the members, but also be informative to the employers that attend the next meeting.

In regards to the employer discussion, Commissioner LaFerte’ suggested the commission have specific questions provided to the employers to compel them to attend. Mr. Darm said the invitation could outline the expectations of the discussion. He added that he learned that it needs to be stated as “conversation” not a “presentation.” Commissioner Knab said the commission should make an effort to reach out to a variety of businesses (small and large) for the next meeting. He said he would work with Mr. Darm to contact these organizations. Commissioner Suárez suggested the commission utilize resources that have numerous contacts in the employer community (such as economic development corporations). Commissioner Hutcheson suggested the commission also ask about success stories for employers to share with the commission so they could learn about strategies that have worked.

Chair Homant asked if the commission wanted to address the “workforce of the future.” She said it may be helpful to ask the question of employers: “how do you see your talent needs of the future?” She said this has been a major issue in the state. Commissioner Suárez said universities and colleges like Florida State College at Jacksonville are developing programs to meet the future talent needs of employers (he used the example of the Advanced Technology Center where the meeting was held). Commissioner Wallace said half of the colleges in the Florida College System are comprehensive institutions, which offers degrees and technical programs. He said it varies by region; some of those regions are employer driven. Commissioner Hutcheson
said it may be a good idea to include the question about the “workforce of the future” for employers at the end of the discussion.

Mr. Darm said he would contact the members the following week to identify employers to invite to the next meeting.

**Committee Breakouts**

The Employment Readiness and Services Subcommittee and Employer Outreach Subcommittee convened at this time. The minutes of these meetings were recorded separately.

**Employer Outreach Subcommittee Update**

Chair Homant called the meeting back to order. She recognized the committee chairs to provide the commission with an update on their discussions.

Commissioner Julio Suárez provided an overview of the progress of the Employer Outreach Subcommittee. The committee is charged with promoting awareness among employers to improve their willingness to employ persons with disabilities in the State of Florida. Commissioner Suárez stated there appears to be a lack of awareness and understanding about how businesses can hire persons with disabilities, and on the incentives that are available to employers. Though there are various agencies and community organizations that support this objective, it would be beneficial to simplify the process to assist employers who are interested in hiring people with disabilities. There is also a lack of understanding on the value persons with disabilities bring to the workplace and the need within the community to provide job opportunities for these individuals.

Commissioner Suárez stated the Employer Outreach Subcommittee is in the process of developing two recommendations, but the committee needs more time to discuss and validate these conclusions before finalizing the recommendations. First, the committee recommends exploring the concept of developing a regional single-point of contact for employers in the community to help them navigate the system. If an employer has a certain number of job opportunities, he or she can contact an individual or office in the community who can help the employer get in touch with the right agency or organization. The single-point of contact could also provide information to the employer on the resources and incentives available to the employer. Since the committee believes there is a lack of understanding of the need, opportunity and benefit to hire persons with disabilities, the committee discussed the idea of leaders within state government provide a “call-to-action” for employers to take advantage of this opportunity and the resources that are available within the community (i.e. utilizing the regional single-point of contact). A prominent figure in the state (such as the Governor) could outline the opportunities persons with disabilities bring to the workforce, and encourage employers to contact the person or office in their communities if they are interested in taking advantage of this opportunity. Commissioner Suárez stated these
two approaches in tandem will be beneficial in bringing about awareness of the value persons with disabilities bring to the workforce and streamlining the disability service system to assist employers to navigate through the resources. He reiterated the committee would like to validate this information with the other commissioners that were not present during this discussion, and understand if other employers agree with these hypotheses to confirm the committee’s conclusions.

Chair Homant informed the committees that they do not have to decide the level of detail when developing some of these recommendations (for example, whether the regions for the single-point of contact should align with the Workforce regions or the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation regions). She encouraged the committees to identify the reason why these particular recommendations are important. For example, the Employer Outreach Subcommittee should define the needed resources within the community where the regional single-point of contact can provide information to employers. In regards to the “call-to-action,” Chair Homant emphasized that persons with disabilities (like everyone else) will only be successful in the workplace if the job is the right fit for the individual. Rather than recommending a call-to-action for employers to hire a certain percentage of persons with disabilities, Chair Homant recommended there should be an emphasis that job opportunities be a reasonable good fit for persons with disabilities. She used an example of her first job out of college as a clerk for a telephone company. Although she did not stay in that job for long, Chair Homant said the job gave her an opportunity to learn about the business and find out what she wanted in a career. Chair Homant stated many job opportunities are not designed to be long-term placements for individuals; however, these jobs can provide an opportunity for individuals to learn about the industry and validate their career goals.

**Employment Readiness and Services Subcommittee Update**

Commissioner Steven Wallace provided the commission with a chart the Employment Readiness and Services Subcommittee discussed. The committee is responsible for focusing on the supports and services that help persons with disabilities become better employees and more competitive in the job market. Commissioner Wallace said the committee has decided to focus on internships as its primary recommendation. Internships serve as the essential intersection between workforce preparation/career training and actual employment entry. Given the challenges to transition from workforce training to employment entry, there needs to be transitional assistance available to persons with disabilities. Commissioner Wallace said the good news is there is a substantial base of internship programs available both on the disability service organizations’ side and the employers’ side. He stated these resources can be better utilized to bring about a more positive outcome, which will require a leadership organizational approach. Commissioner Wallace reiterated what some of the employers said that morning: some employers want to participate in internship programs, but do not know what organizations to contact; other employers are being inundated with requests from organizations to participate in internship programs, but do not know which ones are worth pursuing. As a result, Commissioner Wallace said there needs to be a
more effective approach to organize these resources at a statewide level on behalf of persons with disabilities.

Commissioner Wallace stated the committee has discussed the idea of creating a statewide virtual network that supports disability service organizations, employers, and citizens with disabilities in the pursuit of internships (preferably paid internships). The model places internships at the center, but also recognizes the other elements that are necessary to maximize the effectiveness of the internships (i.e. assistive/adaptive technologies, transportation services, career coaching, etc.). He stated the essential concept is to build on the strategy of the power of internships. These programs serve as the finishing school of the workforce preparation phase for students and employees to gain job experience. Commissioner Wallace said internships provide an opportunity for individuals to get connected with employers (and may result in employment), and they validate the individual’s vocational goal. Effective internship programs also position the students/employees to transition into the workforce and become successful in their careers. He said the end stage is a successful career and the benefits come with that profession (i.e. independence, self worth, etc.). The internship itself (if structured correctly) has a resume-building impact. Commissioner Wallace stated employers are not generally interested in hiring individuals with academic credentials but no work experience (especially for the higher paying positions). Thus, internships help employees demonstrate the value they bring to a position based on the work experience they received during the internship.

Commissioner Wallace said the committee discussed the concept of developing a statewide virtual network, web services based, that would serve as an intermediary for service organizations that connect clients to internships, employers who provide internships, and citizens with disabilities seeking internships. The network would not create new internship programs; rather, it would improve connectivity for these individuals and organizations to participate in these programs. The statewide virtual network would have three components. 1) The network would serve as a one-stop shop for resources (i.e. provide technical assistance, internship manuals, examples of successful internships, etc.); 2) the network would provide referrals to connect people to high quality internships; and 3) the network will advocate for high quality internships to be available to Floridians with disabilities. Commissioner Wallace stated the network would be in the perfect position to provide advocacy (third component) because it will have all the resources available and understand the demand patterns based on the level of referrals. He said the committee needs to be more tactical and conduct research on what organizations and employers are participating in internship programs, and understand the laws and policies that are governing these programs.

Chair Homant thanked the committee chairs

**Public Comment**

Wayne Jennings from the Division of Blind Services thanked the commissioners for their questions about DBS. In regards to the next meeting, Mr. Jennings suggested the
commission invite Walgreens to the employer discussion. He stated the company is looking at developing a universal design for its distribution centers.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Darm thanked the members for their participation in the meeting. He reiterated his expectations for the first report. He emphasized the commission will make recommendations, but it ultimately is the Governor’s decision on what to do with them.

Chair Homant thanked the members. The meeting adjourned.

*Minutes compiled by David Darm.*

**Note:** This meeting has been summarized to reduce paperwork in accordance with policies of the State government. If an accessible format or more information than is provided herein is needed, please contact David Darm at (850) 717-9433 or David.Darm@laspbs.state.fl.us for assistance. A copying or printing fee may be charged to the requesting party.
MEETING DATE: June 8, 2012

AGENDA ITEM:

VI. Committee Updates

STAFF ANALYSIS:

The commission adopted a mission document during the first meeting on January 6, 2012, which directed the commission to divide into three subcommittees and focus on specific strategies that will help the commission develop recommendations to the Governor. The three subcommittees include: 1) Access to Employment Opportunities; 2) Employment Readiness and Services; and 3) Employer Outreach. Each committee has convened through a series of telephone conferences during the last few months. The first report is due to Governor’s Office on July 26, 2012.

The subcommittees have identified three areas to address in the report:

- **The Important Role of Internships** – The commission was founded on the premise that persons with disabilities (PWD) do not experience the same status in the workforce as individuals without disabilities. In order to help change this status, the commission is charged with identifying and correcting misperceptions that PWD are not as valuable to the workforce as employees without disabilities. Internships provide an opportunity for individuals to have direct exposure to the workplace, to acquire skills to become competitive, and for employers to have more direct experience to work with PWD.

- **Streamline Information for Employers** – Employers do not find that there is a lack of supports available to assist in the employment of PWD. Rather, there is much room for improvement for the state to streamline and organize existing services and programs to make it easier for employers to learn about and utilize such resources as is possible. Until such reform occurs, employers will continue to be overwhelmed with information, which discourages them from considering all qualified applicants. The tasks of such reform should be designated under the auspices of a single entity, preferably one with which employers are already engaged.

- **Development of a Communications Plan** – State government leaders should raise awareness among employers as barriers to hiring PWD are addressed. These awareness campaigns should be coupled with success stories highlighting new opportunities and benefits PWDs bring to employers and Florida’s economy.
The committee chairs will provide the commission with a summary of their progress. The subcommittees will also have another opportunity to convene during the lunch break to continue its discussions on developing recommendations.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION:**

The purpose of this item is to inform the commission on the progress of the subcommittees. Members should ask questions or make suggestions to the committee as they prepare to convene during the business meeting.

David DARM  
Executive Director  
June 8, 2012
MEETING DATE: June 8, 2012

AGENDA ITEM:

X. Committee Breakouts

STAFF ANALYSIS:

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As the subcommittees convene, here are some questions to help generate discussion:

- **The Important Role of Internships** – How do we define “internship” in a manner which employers and PWD can agree on? For example, to what extent should an internship resemble a typical work schedule (5 days a week, eight hours a day) so that an individual can better transition from an academic setting to a work environment? To what manner and to what extent should internships be flexible so employers and PWD are encouraged to participate?

- **Streamline Information for Employers** – If the state developed an information resource for employers to learn about the services and supports available in their community and how to utilize them, where would be the ideal location of that resource? For individuals with disabilities interested in utilizing services and supports to be more successful in a workplace, would this resource for employers be able to serve them as well? How would this resource help employers to expand the pool of applicants; how would it improve the employment opportunities for PWDs?

- **Development of a Communications Plan** – What measures can be taken to ensure that a communications strategy is most effecting in reaching the employer community? Several state agencies currently provide success stories of their clients in a workplace (see attached brochure for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation as an example). How can these stories best highlight new opportunities and benefits PWDs bring to employers and Florida’s economy?

ATTACHMENT:

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Success Stories Brochure
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION:

The subcommittees should use these questions to help them narrow their focus in developing recommendations.

David Darm
Executive Director
June 8, 2012
MEETING DATE: June 8, 2012

AGENDA ITEM:

VIII. Discussion on Barriers to Employment

STAFF ANALYSIS:

The commission is charged with addressing the problems that have prevented persons with disabilities from experiencing the same status in the workforce as individuals without disabilities. The lack of employment opportunities confronting persons with disabilities is the outcome of the problems. Despite major efforts made by policymakers to provide equal opportunities to persons with disabilities, access to employment remains one of the greatest challenges facing these individuals. The commission is directed to help change this outcome by developing public policy solutions and strategies that break down the barriers to employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

During the April 27 meeting in Jacksonville, the commission discussed two types of barriers confronting persons with disabilities: 1) barriers within the system that require policy changes; and 2) perception barriers that will require long-term strategies to help level the playing field for PWD. The commission’s recommendations should address the specific barriers it intends to change. For example, if the commission recommends internships as an avenue to improve access to employment for PWD, it should identify the misperceptions that might be changed as a result of internships. The commission may also identify barriers that it cannot recommend a specific solution for this first report. For example, the loss of medical benefits as a result of employment is a barrier that impacts many people with disabilities who cannot work after a certain period of time without acquiring medical coverage. Such barriers may require further discussion and research for the commission to develop the best solutions.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION:

The commission’s recommendations should address the specific barriers it intends to change. Furthermore, the commission should identify barriers that it intends to study in the future, such as the loss of medical benefits as a result of employment.

David Darm
Executive Director
June 8, 2012
MEETING DATE: June 8, 2012

AGENDA ITEM:

II. Approval of the April 27, 2012 Minutes

STAFF ANALYSIS:

Pursuant to the provisions of the Florida Government in the Sunshine Law, the commission is required to record the minutes of each meeting and have that information available to the public. The commission convened a business meeting on April 27, 2012, in Jacksonville, Florida. The minutes of that meeting are attached to this document.

ATTACHMENTS:

April 27, 2012 Minutes

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION:

The commission should approve the April 27, 2012 minutes.

David Darm
Executive Director
June 8, 2012