

To: Business, Labor, and Technology Committee
From: Bob Lawhead, Policy Advisor, Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council
Re: SB21-095 Sunset Employment First Advisory Partnership
Date: March 22, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for your consideration of SB21-095 Sunset Employment First Advisory Partnership. My name is Bob Lawhead. I serve as Policy Advisor for the Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council and have served as Co-Chair of Colorado's Employment First Advisory Partnership from 2017 to the present.

The Employment First Advisory Partnership (EFAP) created by SB16-077 *Employment First for Persons with Disabilities* and administered by the State Rehabilitation Council of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation within the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, has been successful in meeting its initial goals. The five EFAP state agency partners (CDLE, CDE, CDHE, CDHS and HCPF) signed a MOU outlining their commitment and mutual collaborative intent, and the EFAP submitted its [Strategic Plan](#) to the Colorado General Assembly in 2017.

The overarching goal of this plan, as outlined in the authorizing legislation, is to expand employment opportunities for Coloradans with disabilities. EFAP state agency partners have implemented a number of recommendations outlined within the plan and the General Assembly has subsequently passed additional related legislation ([SB18-145 Implement Employment First Recommendations](#)) as well as targeted Employment First appropriations to CDLE and HCPF in 2019.

While much progress in expanding employment opportunities for Colorado citizens with disabilities has been made, the COVID-19 pandemic has complicated this effort. The pandemic has resulted in job losses for people with disabilities and has reduced the state's employment service capacity. The EFAP has continued to meet to assure that the strategic plan implementation efforts continue and are modified to meet these challenges. One strategy the EFAP has recently discussed is a hiring incentive pilot program to encourage state agencies to increase the number of people with disabilities hired onto state government positions. This concept is consistent with EFAP's Strategic Plan, Recommendation 8: "Become a 'model employer' of Colorado citizens with disabilities" and is scheduled to be presented as an important amendment to SB21-095.

The Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council enthusiastically supports the recommendation of DORA's 2020 Sunset Report to continue the Employment First Advisory Partnership (EFAP) and encourages your consideration of the state hiring incentive pilot program amendment. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me should you desire additional background and/or contemporary information about the EFAP and our work.