

Employment First Act

Section _____, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

Florida Employment First Act

- (1) Legislative Intent: Employment is the most direct and cost-effective means in helping an individual achieve independence and self-fulfillment. However, they are confronted by unique barriers to employment that inhibit their opportunities to fairly compete in the labor force s. It is the intent of the Legislature to provide a framework for a long-term commitment to improving employment outcomes for persons with disabilities in the State of Florida through the implementation of the Florida Employment First Act.
- (2) Purpose: The purpose of the Florida Employment First Act is to raise expectations that employment should be prioritized for individuals with disabilities and to change the system to better support integrated employment. Employment First requires a collaborative effort by state agencies and organizations to first determine the strengths and barriers to achieving better employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities and, thereafter, act collaboratively to build on the strengths and eliminate barriers.
- (3) Definitions: For the purposes of this section –
 - (a) Employment is defined as integrated employment, including supported employment, customized employment, and self-employment, where an individual is paid by an employer at minimum wage or greater or receives earnings through one’s self-employment business, fully integrated in the community workforce, with a goal of maximum self-sufficiency. Employment outcomes are based on each individual’s measurable vocational goals, skills, and abilities, with the intent to also meet the expectations and hiring needs of the employer.
- (4) Employment First Policy: It is the policy of the state that employment should be prioritized for individuals with disabilities and that system change is necessary to better support employment.
- (5) The following state agencies and organizations shall develop and implement an interagency cooperative agreement to implement the Florida Employment First Act:
 - (a) The Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation;
 - (b) The Department of Education, Division of Blind Services;
 - (c) The Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services;
 - (d) The Agency for Persons with Disabilities
 - (e) The Department of Children and Families, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Program;

- (f) The Department of Economic Opportunity;
 - (g) Workforce, Inc. d/b/a CareerSource Florida;
 - (h) Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.; and
 - (i) Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, Inc.
- (6) The interagency cooperative agreement shall outline the roles and responsibilities of the state agencies and disability organizations identified in subsection (5) to accomplish the purpose of this Act. The objectives of this interagency cooperative agreement shall include the following:
- (a) Establishing a commitment among the agencies' leadership to maximize resources and coordinate with each other to improve employment outcomes for persons with disabilities seeking publically funded services;
 - (b) Developing strategic goals and reasonable benchmarks to assist the agencies in implementing this agreement;
 - (c) Identifying financing and contracting methods that will prioritize employment among the array of services paid for or provided by agencies;
 - (d) Identifying ways training opportunities can be better utilized by agency employees and contacted providers to ensure effectiveness of employment services;
 - (e) Ensuring collaboration occurs during the development of service plans, including the Individual Plan for Employment, when individuals are served by multiple agencies to achieve their employment goals;
 - (f) Promoting service innovations; and
 - (g) Identifying accountability measures to ensure sustainability.
- (7) The state agencies that are parties to the interagency cooperative agreement are authorized to adopt rules to implement this Act.