

Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE)

Executive Director's Report to the General Membership

Time Frame: February 2025-May 7, 2025

Submitted by: Elizabeth Gordon, Executive Director

**Executive Order 24-05:** GCDE led the work on rewriting Executive Order 24-05. This executive order, "Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disabilities in State Government", focuses on making Washington state government an employer of choice for people with disabilities. This EO was written by, for, and with people with disabilities both within and outside of state government, other state agencies, and state leaders. It was a long-time project that was finally signed in December of 2024, and implementation started in January 2025. A few highlights from that EO are:

- Requires all state employees to take training on accessibility, including making accessible documents
- Requires all leaders and supervisors to take training in reasonable accommodation
- Requires state agencies to evaluate their progress toward hiring people with disabilities, and set goals to ensure that they have full representation in all levels of the state agency

**Digital Equity Forum (DEF):** Washington State Office of Equity and Washington State Broadband Office convene the DEF to work on the state's goal "to provide all residents access to high-speed broadband". The larger group meets monthly, with subcommittee meetings at least monthly, or more often based on work. Elizabeth co-chairs the Broadband Accessibility and Services Subcommittee, whose primary goal is to identify gaps in the system and make recommendations for solutions. The group will make recommendations to the governor and the legislature in late 2025. Digital Equity and access were identified by GCDE members as a key issue during the pandemic and in the years following the pandemic, which is why we have a seat at this council. This group focuses on the statewide plan and recommends funding for services. Currently, the Accessibility and Services subcommittee meets weekly and is planning listening sessions with digital navigators across the state to learn about their recommendations for increased digital access and accessibility, since they work directly with people who disproportionately have difficulty with digital access and accessibility. GCDE identified digital equity as a concern, and we have been involved in this work for a couple of years.

**Office of Equity Commission Meetings:** Representatives from the various Commissions and Committees meet with the Office of Equity in a roundtable discussion of the work happening at each agency, and to have collaborative working space. Agencies represented include Commission on African American Affairs, Department of Veteran's Affairs, Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, Women's Commission, Commission of Hispanic Affairs, LGBTQ Commission, and Commission on Asian Pacific Affairs.

**Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities:** Elizabeth attends their quarterly meetings. Proposed legislation this session would have given GCDE a seat on this council, but did not pass. GCDE members identified the need to have a voice to address disparities that people with disabilities encounter in the healthcare setting. This is an important way for GCDE to have a voice to talk about health equity from a disability perspective. [Home | Health Equity](#)

**Legislative Session:** Session ended in April. GCDE reviewed more than 350 pieces of legislation and had a short list of 20 priority bills for this session. Please see the spreadsheet included in your materials for updates.

Washington State Budget: A combination of a budget shortfall in Washington state, and reductions in funding from the federal level, are impacting state agencies. The proposed state budget for the 2025-2026 biennium contains cuts across state agencies. Staffing reductions are already happening in some state agencies such as Department of Health and are expected in most agencies. We won't know the full scope of those cuts until Governor Ferguson signs the budget, which is expected soon. The hiring freeze remains in effect for GCDE, as does the travel and contracting freeze. We will know of any other reductions in the next couple of weeks. Elizabeth attends the federal subcabinet meetings about the federal cuts. We will have a panel at our meeting on Friday May 16, 2025, to talk about federal cuts, and how they are impacting services for people in Washington state.

**Statewide Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Council:** Elizabeth attends the council meetings to represent people with disabilities, and workers with disabilities employed by the state. The group meets monthly. For more information, visit the website: [OFM State HR DEI Council](#)

### **Other Activities**

- Cross Disability Action Coalition: this is a group that supports legislative action by people with disabilities. It is hosted by Disability Rights Washington, and GCDE attends these meetings to stay informed and support advocacy efforts across disability groups.
- Disability-Access and Functional Needs Collaborative: This group focuses on emergency planning and is convened by the Department of Health. This is the group that activates in times of emergency, such as during a wildfire event, to ensure that folks with disabilities affected by the event get the supports that they need. With the budget cuts at Department of Health, the future of this group is unknown. Agency partners are working to ensure we are connected to advocate for people with disabilities in the event of an emergency.
- Directors' Meetings: Directors of Washington State Rehabilitation Council, Developmental Disabilities Council, Washington State Independent Living Council, Washington School to Work Coordination Board, and Arc of Washington meet monthly to learn about and support one another's work.

- Schedule A Hiring: Partnership initiated by Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Department of Services for the Blind business services to identify ways to implement measures to streamline hiring of people with disabilities into state positions.
- Town Hall - Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing: ODHH received funding to convene community members to identify ideas and solutions that impact the American Sign Language interpreter shortage. They will be submitting recommendations to the legislature soon.
- Accessibility pilots and workshops: GCDE staff attended and gave feedback on new workshops for state employees related to accessibility. Three Employment Security Department trainings were: creating accessible documents, creating accessible emails, and creating accessible spreadsheets. Additional work is being done by staff in coordination with the Disability Inclusion Network to ensure digital accessibility training, standards, and materials are created for state employees across the enterprise (as well as within ESD). All GCDE staff are engaged in this work in various ways.