

DHSS Secretary Selected to Serve on U.S. Advisory Committee on Increasing Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities

Wilmington – Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Secretary Rita Landgraf has been chosen to serve on the new U.S. Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities, U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez announced Monday.

Landgraf, who has spent more than 30 years of her career in support of individuals with disabilities, served as a key adviser to Gov. Jack Markell during his yearlong initiative as Chair of the National Governors Association to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The Governor's 2012-2013 initiative, "A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities," culminated with the release of a [blueprint](#) for his fellow governors specifically focused on the role that state governments and businesses can play in creating more employment opportunities for people with disabilities and on improving employment outcomes. Landgraf continues to work with the Governor to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Delaware's private, nonprofit and public sectors.

"I am thrilled Secretary Perez has chosen Rita to serve on this new advisory committee," Governor Markell said. "She is an ideal choice to move this work forward on a national level

because she never forgets that, at its core, this is about people and the talents and skills they can share with others in the workplace. As the employment picture continues to improve nationwide, it is important we find additional ways to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. With Rita's knowledge and experience, she is uniquely qualified to do just that."

Under Governor Markell's leadership and in partnership with the business community, Delaware reported an 8.6 percent increase in active employment for individuals with disabilities from 2011 to 2013. Markell also has made hiring of people with disabilities a priority for state government using hiring practices and programs to increase employment levels.

After the University of Delaware, in collaboration with the State of Delaware, conducted a comprehensive survey of state employees in 2013, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) identified two key areas for training: disability awareness among all employees, and refinement of state hiring practices and systems in order to recruit more qualified applicants with disabilities. An online class, "Focus on Ability," became available to all state employees in October 2014. A classroom training program for managers and supervisors will begin this year.

Secretary Landgraf, who has served as DHSS Cabinet Secretary since January 2009, is the former executive director of The Arc of Delaware and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Delaware. She also served as president of AARP Delaware. She was nominated to serve on the U.S. Advisory Committee by the National Disability Institute and received a letter of recommendation from Governor Markell.

"I was honored to be nominated by the National Disability

Institute and to be supported by Governor Markell, and I am equally honored to be selected to serve by Secretary Perez," Secretary Landgraf said. "My entire career has been motivated by this deeply rooted belief: We all benefit when individuals with disabilities are able to share their gifts and talents with others and vice versa. We know that too often what separates people with disabilities from the rest of the population is financial security. I believe, as the Governor does, that individuals with disabilities should not have to choose between meaningful employment and retaining the supports and services they receive through Medicaid and other government programs. I look forward to advising Secretary Perez on ways to advance employment opportunities across the country for individuals with disabilities."

The new U.S. Advisory Committee is a key provision of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law by President Barack Obama in July 2014. The law supports job seekers, including individuals with disabilities, access services to succeed in employment and matches employers with skilled workers. The committee will advise the U.S. Secretary of Labor on ways to increase competitive integrated employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities.

Integrated employment refers to jobs held by people with disabilities in workplace setting where the majority of employees do not have disabilities. In these jobs, individuals with disabilities earn wages consistent with those paid workers with disabilities performing the same or similar work, making at least minimum wage and are paid directly by their employer.

Secretary Landgraf is one of 17 selected members of the committee chosen from more than 280 nominations nationwide.

Seven federal officials will also serve on the committee. Other members represent:

- Self-advocates for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities;
- Providers of employment services, including those who employ individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities in competitive integrated employment;
- Representatives of national disability advocacy organizations;
- Experts with a background in academia or research in employment and wage policy issues for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities;
- Representatives of the employer community;
- Other individuals with expertise on increasing opportunities for competitive integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

The first meeting of the committee will take place Jan. 22-23 at the U.S. Access Board in Washington. More information about the committee, its members, and upcoming meetings can be found at: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/WIOA.htm>.

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