



Governor's Commission on Disabilities Legislation Committee

Monday, December 8, 2014 3:00 - 4:30 PM

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Cranston, RI 02920-3049

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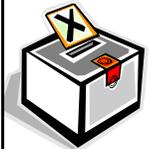
Attendees: Linda Ward (Chair.); Jack Ringland (Vice Chair.); Heather Daglieri; Casey Gartland; & Arthur M. Plitt
Absentees: Rosemary C. Carmody; Regina Connor; Linda Deschenes; Timothy Flynn; Elaina Goldstein; Barbara Henry; Kathleen Heren; William R. Inlow; Msgr. Gerard O. Sabourin; Meredith Sheehan; Angelina Stabile; & Dawn Wardyga

Staff: Bob Cooper



3:00 Call to Order and Acceptance of the Minutes, Linda Ward, Chair

Chair called the meeting to order at 3:13 pm
Introductions of Commissioners and guests



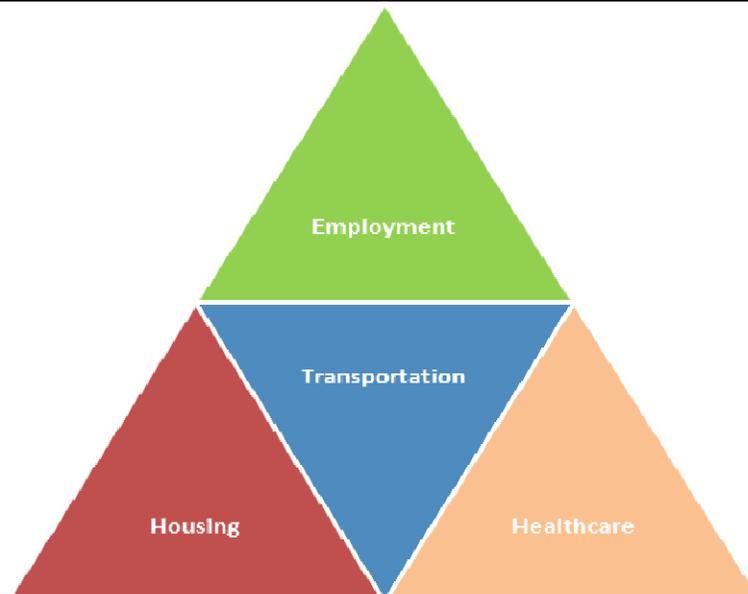
MOTION: To accept the minutes of the previous meeting as presented
Motion moved by CG, seconded by AP, passed unanimously

Action Items:



3:05 2015 Legislative Package, Bob Cooper, Executive Secretary

Purpose/Goal: To review the Commission's legislative package



1) Employment

- a) Implement the National Governor's Association's "A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities: Blueprint for Governors":
 - i) Make disability employment part of the state workforce development strategy;
 - ii) Find and support businesses in their efforts to employ people with disabilities;
 - iii) Be a model employer by increasing the number of people with disabilities working in state government;
 - iv) Prepare youth with disabilities for careers that use their full potential, providing employers with a pipeline of skilled workers; and
 - v) Make the best use of limited resources to advance employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- b) Improve school to adult transitional to adult services / employment / post-secondary education; and
- c) Maintain a range of employment options.

2) Housing to Employment supports services:

- a) Restore the Neighborhood Opportunities Program funding;
- b) Create a supportive housing program;
- c) Expansion of Affordable Housing - require at least 2 additional affordable housing units for cities and towns that have not met the affordable housing goals; and
- d) Maintain Home Modification funding level.

3) Transportation to Employment, job training, education, health care, etc.

- a) Maintain the existing RIPTA/RIde service areas;
- b) Adequate funding/new & stable funding source;
- c) Expand the RIPTA/RIde service areas/hours beyond the existing service/hours;
- d) Require RIPTA to establish a sliding scale RIde fare; and
- e) Transportation Study Commission - follow-up to the 2004 - 2007 Study.

4) Healthcare/Medicaid Employment support services needed to sustain paid work; remain or become as independent as possible;

- a) Promote and expand the use of the RIGL 40-8.7 Health Care Assistance for Working People with Disabilities (Sherlock Plan);
- b) Restore the 2008 level of services for persons with severe disabilities:
 - i) The Katie Beckett and children with autism spectrum disorders eligibility rules;
 - ii) The right to medically necessary brand name drugs without requiring two generic failures before allowing brand name; and
 - iii) Multiple behavioral healthcare service delivery models.
- c) Restore disability service funding;
- d) Post-Global Medicaid Consumer Choice Waiver Transition Plan; and

5) Adopt a plan to shift from a multi-departmental service delivery system to one-stop service for all human service needs, including:

- a) Single point of entry for all services;
- b) Benefits Web Portalⁱⁱ with
- c) Peer Navigators and/or Benefits Specialists to assist citizens through the eligibility process for services.

1 a) Chapter 42-102 Governor's Workforce Board Rhode Island

§ 42-102-2 Composition of workforce board. [Effective February 1, 2015]. - (a) The workforce board shall be composed of twenty-one (21) members; one of whom shall be the secretary of commerce, who shall be vice-chair; one of whom shall be the director of the department of labor and training; one of whom shall be the commissioner of education; one of whom shall be a representative of a public institution of higher education in Rhode Island; and seventeen (17) public members, eleven (11) of whom shall be representatives from the employer community, in a manner that is representative of employers of different sizes and sectors, including the nonprofit sector, provided that two (2) of the representatives from the employer community shall be the chairs of Rhode Island's local workforce investment boards, or their designees, appointed from among the employer community members of the local workforce investment boards; four (4) of whom shall be representatives of organized labor; and two (2) members shall be representatives of community-based organizations that provide or promote workforce development service; appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the senate. The seventeen (17) public members shall be appointed in a manner that reflects the geographic diversity of the state, and at least five (5) of whom shall be women; at least four (4) of whom shall be from minority communities; *and at least one of whom shall be a person with disabilities*. The governor shall appoint a chairperson from among the eleven (11) representatives of the employer community.

(b) The board may establish an executive committee composed of members appointed by the chair. The board may delegate to the executive committee any powers of the board except those powers that are required by law to be exercised by the board. The chair may also appoint ad hoc committees, workgroups, or task forces to assist the board as appropriate.

(c) Members serving as of the effective date of this act on the state workforce investment board established pursuant to Executive Order No. 05-18 ordered on September 22, 2005, shall continue to serve their terms of office as members of the governor's workforce board established under this chapter.

§ 42-102-6 Powers and duties. [Effective February 1, 2015]. - (a) Strategic statewide employment and training plan.

(1) The board shall meet with other entities involved with career and technical education, workforce development, and career training and shall be responsible for the development of a comprehensive, and cohesive statewide employment-and-training plan. The strategic, statewide employment-and-training plan shall include goals and objectives for serving the state's existing and emerging workforce utilizing all state and federal workforce development programs. The board shall take into consideration the needs of all segments of the state's citizenry in establishing goals and training objectives, including the workforce needs of the state's employers.

(2) The strategic statewide employment and training plan shall be developed biennially and shall cover the subsequent, two (2) fiscal years. Said biennial plans shall be submitted on November 15. The biennial plan shall outline goals and objectives of the coordinated programs system, major priorities needed for the next two-year (2) period, and policies and requirements necessary to meet those priorities. The board shall provide a funding plan necessary to achieve system priorities and serve the anticipated number of participants and shall identify the general revenue funds necessary to meet program needs, taking into account anticipated federal, private, and other sources of funds. The biennial plan shall incorporate the annual unified workforce development system report required pursuant to subsection (f) in those years in which both reports are due.

(3) The board shall develop and maintain a comprehensive inventory and analysis of workforce development activities in the state to support the biennial statewide employment and training plan. The analysis shall include, but not be limited to, an examination of the populations being served across the different employment and training and adult education programs across the state; the number of participants being served by these programs; the type of services provided; and the eligibility requirements of each of these programs. The analysis shall also identify the funding sources (all sources) used in these programs; the service providers within the state; as well as the range of services provided. The analysis shall also examine the employer role in workforce development activities, including, but not limited to, how employer needs are assessed, benefits employers receive for

partnering with workforce development organizations, and the role employers play in developing programs and providing training.

(4) The board shall establish and convene an advisory group to assist in the development of this comprehensive inventory and analysis that consists of stakeholders and organizations with specific knowledge and expertise in the area of workforce development.

(5) All departments and agencies of the state shall furnish advice and information, documentary or otherwise, to the board and its agents as is deemed necessary or desirable by the board to facilitate the purposes of the board, including the development of the statewide, employment-and-training plan.

(6) Elements of the statewide employment and training plan established pursuant to subsection (a) of this section may inform the development of the state workforce investment plan required pursuant to § 42-102-6(d)(2)(i).

(b) Performance management and coordination of employment-and-training programs.

(1) The board shall establish statewide policies, definitions, objectives, goals, and guidelines for the coordination of all employment-and-training programs and related services and programs within the state, including:

(i) The state department of labor and training programs, sponsored under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Wagner-Peyser Act, 29 U.S.C. 49 et seq., the Trade Act of 2002, and any other employment-related educational program administered by the state department of labor and training;

(ii) The state department of human services training programs, sponsored under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Title IV of the Social Security Act; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Program; *Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, and any other employment-and-training and related services and employment-related educational programs administered by the state's department of human services;

(iii) Employment and training programs sponsored under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq., the Federal Adult Education Act, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and any other employment-related educational programs administered by the board of education;

(iv) The state department of corrections training programs for ex-offenders to help them reintegrate into the community and re-enter employment;

(v) Projects and services funded through the job development fund pursuant to § 42-102-6(e)(1);

(vi) All other employment-and-training and related services and employment-related educational programs, either presently existing or hereinafter established that are administered by any state agencies, departments, or councils; and

(vii) Programs included within subsections (b)(1)(i) through (b)(1)(vi) of this section shall be referred herein collectively as "the coordinated programs system".

(2) With respect to plans for employment-and-training programs sponsored under the federal Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq., and any other employment-related educational programs administered by the board of education, the workforce board and board of education shall establish a process for the development and preparation of all these plans and the board of education shall approve the plan subject to review and comment by the workforce board; provided, however, that the responsibilities and duties of the board of education, as set forth in the general laws, shall not be abridged.

(3) With respect to plans for the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program, SNAP Employment and Training Program, *Vocational Rehabilitation Services*, and any other employment-and-training and related programs administered by the state's department of human services, the authority and responsibilities of the department as the single state agency under Titles IV-A, 42 U.S.C. 601 through 617, and IV-F, 42 U.S.C. 681 through 687 [repealed], of the Federal Social Security Act shall not be abridged.

(4) With respect to plans for training ex-offenders to help them reintegrate into the community and re-enter employment, and any other employment-and-training programs administered by the state's department of corrections, the responsibilities and duties of the department, as set forth in the general laws, shall not be abridged.

(5) The board shall review, comment on, or approve as appropriate all plans for employment and training within the coordinated-programs system. The board shall establish policies and performance goals for the coordinated-programs system. These policies and goals shall include, but not be limited to:

- (i) Establishing and communicating uniform policies and consistent terms and definitions;
- (ii) Gathering and distributing information from, and to, all agencies, departments, and councils within the coordinated-programs system;
- (iii) Standardizing and coordinating program planning, evaluation, budgeting, and funding processes;
- (iv) Recommending structural and procedural changes;
- (v) Establishing performance goals and measurements for monitoring the effectiveness of the programs provided through the coordinated-programs system; and
- (vi) Reconciling diverse agency, departmental, or council goals and developing priorities among those goals.

(c) Comprehensive system-improvement plan.

(1) The 2015 unified workforce development system report required pursuant to § 42-102-6(f) and due on November 15, 2015 shall include an additional, comprehensive system-improvement plan to facilitate the seamless and coordinated delivery of workforce services in this state, consistent with the goals and objectives of the board's statewide employment-and-training plan. In developing the comprehensive, system-improvement plan, the board shall review the roles, responsibilities, and functions of all state employment-and-training programs. The study shall identify any gaps in the services provided by those programs; any barriers to integration and cooperation of these programs; and any other matters that adversely affect the seamless delivery of workforce-development systems in the state.

(2) The board shall include in the comprehensive, system-improvement plan:

- (i) A list of specific barriers, whether structural, regulatory, or statutory, that adversely affect the seamless, and coordinated, delivery of workforce-development programs and services in this state, as well as recommendations to overcome or eliminate these barriers; and
- (ii) Recommendations for providing, at a minimum, board comment and review of all state employment-and-training programs, to ensure such programs are consistent with the board's statewide employment-and-training plan, and meet the current, and projected, workforce demands of this state, including programs that, pursuant to state or federal law or regulation, must remain autonomous.

(3) The recommendations developed by the board under subsection (c)(1) must identify the state agency or department that is responsible for implementing each recommendation; and include a time frame for the implementation of each recommendation. The governor may include such recommendations in his or her proposed budget the following fiscal year.

(d) Workforce investment act responsibilities.

(1) The board shall assume the duties and responsibilities of the state workforce investment board established pursuant to Executive Order 05-18 dated September 22, 2005, as outlined in subsection(c)(2).

(2) The board shall assist the governor and the general assembly in:

- (i) Developing a state workforce-investment plan for the purposes of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and the Wagner-Peyser Act;
- (ii) Actively promoting and coordinating private-sector involvement in the workforce-investment system through the development of partnerships among state agencies, the business community, and the Board;
- (iii) Ensuring that the current, and projected, workforce needs of Rhode Island employers inform and advise Rhode Island's education and workforce-development system;
- (iv) Providing oversight of local workforce-investment boards, whose primary role in the workforce investment system is to deliver employment, training, and related education services in their respective local area; and
- (v) Developing a statewide system of activities that are funded under the WIA or carried out through the one-stop delivery system, including:

- (A) Assuring coordination and non duplication among the programs and activities carried out by one-stop partners;
- (B) Reviewing local workforce-investment plans;
- (C) Designating local workforce-investment areas in accordance with federal law;
- (D) Developing allocation formulas for the distribution of funds for adult employment-and-training activities and youth activities to local areas;

(E) Developing comprehensive state performance measures as prescribed by federal law, including state-adjusted levels of performance, to assess the effectiveness of the workforce-investment activities in the state;

(F) Preparing the annual report to the Secretary of Labor described in WIA;

(G) Developing the statewide employment statistics system;

(H) Developing an application for incentive grants;

(I) Carrying out the responsibilities of a local board as outlined in WIA; and

(J) Addressing any other issue requiring input from the board under the provisions of WIA.

(e) Job-development fund responsibilities.

(1) The board shall allocate monies from the job-development fund for projects to implement the recommendations of the board consistent with the statewide employment-and-training plan established pursuant to § 42-102-6(a).

(f) Unified workforce development system report.

(1) The board shall produce and submit an annual, unified, workforce-development system report to the governor, the speaker of the house, the president of the senate, and the secretary of state. The report shall be submitted annually on November 15. The report shall cover activity having taken place the preceding fiscal year ending June 30 and shall include:

(i) A fiscal and programmatic report for the governor's workforce board covering the previous fiscal year including:

(A) A summary of the board's activities and accomplishments during the previous fiscal year;

(B) A summary of clerical, administrative, professional, or technical reports received by the board during the previous fiscal year, if applicable;

(C) A briefing on anticipated activities in the upcoming fiscal year;

(D) A consolidated financial statement of all funds received, and expended, by the board, including the source of funds, during the previous fiscal year;

(E) A listing of any staff supported by these funds;

(ii) A unified, expenditure-and-program report for statewide employment-and-training programs and related services including:

(A) Expenditures by agencies for programs included in § 42-102-6(b)(1), including information regarding the number of individuals served by each program; demographic information by gender, race and ethnicity; outcome and program-specific performance information as determined by the board, and such other information as may be determined by the board, including, but not limited to, the attainment of credentials;

(2) Beginning November 15, 2015, program expenditures included in the unified, workforce-development-system report shall be categorized as administrative, program delivery, or other costs; the report shall further include information on the cost-per-individual served within each program, through a manner determined by the board;

(3) All state and local agencies, departments, or council or similar organizations within the coordinated-programs system, shall be required to provide the board with the information necessary to produce the unified workforce-development-system report.

	Commission should recommend the Governor to appoint representative of the Commission, Sara Everhart Skeels, to the Governor's Workforce Board.
	<p style="text-align: center;">2 b) Create a Supportive Housing Program</p> <p>The purpose of a permanent supportive housing program would be to produce additional housing for individuals with disabilities that is coupled with services and case management to stabilize homeless individuals in permanent housing at affordable rents for persons receiving Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI).</p>

AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- RHODE ISLAND HOUSING RESOURCES ACT OF 1998

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 42-128-8 of the General Laws in Chapter 42-128 entitled "Rhode Island Housing Resources Act of 1998" is hereby amended to read as follows:

42-128-8. Powers and duties. -- In order to provide housing opportunities for all Rhode Islanders, to maintain the quality of housing in Rhode Island, and to coordinate and make effective the housing responsibilities of the agencies and subdivisions of the state, the commission shall have the following powers and duties:

(1) Policy, planning and coordination of state housing functions. - The commission shall have the power and duty:

(i) To prepare and adopt the state's plans for housing; provided, however, that this provision shall not be interpreted to contravene the prerogative of the state planning council to adopt a state guide plan for housing.

(ii) To prepare, adopt, and issue the state's housing policy.

(iii) To conduct research on and make reports regarding housing issues in the state.

(iv) To advise the governor and general assembly on housing issues and to coordinate housing activities among government agencies and agencies created by state law or providing housing services under government programs.

(2) Establish, implement, and monitor state performance measures and guidelines for housing programs. - The commission shall have the power and the duty:

(i) To promulgate performance measures and guidelines for housing programs conducted under state law.

(ii) To monitor and evaluate housing responsibilities established by state law, and to establish a process for annual reporting on the outcomes of the programs and investments of the state in housing for low and moderate income people.

(iii) To hear and resolve disputes pertaining to housing issues.

(3) Administer the programs pertaining to housing resources that may be assigned by state law. - The commission shall have the power and duty to administer programs for housing, housing services, and community development, including, but not limited to, programs pertaining to:

(i) Abandoned properties and the remediation of blighting conditions.

(ii) Lead abatement and to manage a lead hazard abatement program in cooperation with the Rhode Island housing and mortgage finance corporation.

(iii) Services for the homeless.

(iv) Rental assistance.

(v) Community development.

(vi) Outreach, education and technical assistance services.

(vii) Assistance, including financial support, to non-profit organizations and community development corporations.

(viii) Tax credits that assist in the provision of housing or foster community development or that result in support to non-profit organizations performing functions to accomplish the purposes of this chapter.

(ix) The Supportive Services Program, the purpose of which is to help prevent and end homelessness among those who have experienced long-term homelessness and for whom certain services in addition to housing are essential. State funding for this program may leverage other resources for the purpose of providing supportive services. Services provided pursuant to this subsection may include, but not be limited to: assistance with budgeting and paying rent; access to employment; encouraging tenant involvement in facility management and policies; medication monitoring and management; daily living skills related to food, housekeeping and socialization; counseling to support self-identified goals; referrals to mainstream health, mental health and treatment programs; and conflict resolution.

(x) The neighborhood opportunities program, the purpose of which shall be to address the housing and revitalization needs of the state's deteriorating neighborhoods. The neighborhood opportunities program shall provide financial assistance to implement the following three (3) components:

(A) The family affordable housing program, the purpose of which shall be to produce an additional supply of housing units at rents affordable to families working at or near minimum wage. State funding

will leverage other resources for the production of housing, to create mixed income housing, and to revitalize neighborhoods through the rehabilitation of existing substandard units.

(B) The permanent supportive housing program, the purpose of which shall be to produce additional housing for individuals with disabilities to be coupled with services and case management to stabilize homeless individuals in permanent housing at affordable rents for persons receiving supplemental social security income (SSI).

(C) The neighborhood revitalization program, the purpose of which shall be to provide grants to local communities for renovation, demolition, and homeownership opportunities in neighborhoods designated for revitalization.

	Staff should invite Housing Coalition, and RI Housing, Housing Commission to January meeting to discuss supportive housing options.
	3 e) Updating the 2004 Joint Resolution Creating A Special Commission To Study Transit Service In The State Of Rhode Island This resolution created a ten (10) member commission whose purpose was to study transit service in the state of Rhode Island and it reported back to the general assembly May 29, 2007.

RESOLVED, That a special legislative commission be and the same is hereby created consisting of ten (10) members: one of whom shall be from the house of representatives, to be appointed by the speaker; one of whom shall be from the senate, to be appointed by the senate president; one of whom shall be the director of the Rhode Island department of transportation, or designee; one of whom shall be the general manager of the Rhode Island public transit authority, or designee; one of whom shall be the director of the *department* of elderly affairs, or designee; one of whom shall be a representative of the environmental community appointed by the senate president; one of whom shall be a representative of an economic development group, to be appointed by the senate president; one of whom shall be a representative from labor, to be appointed by the speaker; one of whom shall be a representative from the business community, to be appointed by the speaker; and one of whom shall be the executive secretary of the Governor's Commission on Disabilities, or designee.

In lieu of any appointment of a member of the legislature to a permanent advisory commission, a legislative study commission, or any commission created by a general assembly resolution, the appointing authority may appoint a member of the general public to serve in lieu of a legislator; provided, that the majority leader or the minority leader of the political party which is entitled to the appointment consents to the appointment of the member of the general public.

The purpose of said commission shall be to study all aspects of transit, including, but not limited to: (a) ways to increase paying ridership; (b) financial issues the Rhode Island public transit authority faces; (c) ways to maximize the level of transit service the state can afford on a long-term sustainable basis, thus allowing the authority to responsibly plan ahead for future improvements, and its customers to plan ahead with some assurance of future service levels; and ways to measure performance of service.

Forthwith upon passage of this resolution, the members of the commission shall meet at call of the speaker of the house and organize and shall select from among the legislators a chairperson.

Vacancies in said commission shall be filled in like manner as the original appointment.

The membership of said commission shall receive no compensation for their services.

All departments and agencies of the state shall furnish such advice and information, documentary and otherwise, to said commission and its agents as is deemed necessary or desirable by the commission to facilitate the purposes of this resolution.

The joint committee on legislative services is hereby authorized and directed to provide suitable quarters for said commission; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the commission shall report its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly on or before February 25, 2005 and said commission shall expire on April 22, 2005.

	Staff should invite Grow Smart, Coalition for Transportation Choice, RIPTA Riders & other interested parties to discuss options for expanding RIPTA/RIde service.
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4 b ii) An Act Relating To Prescription Drugs

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Chapter 27-18 of the General Laws entitled "Accident and Sickness Insurance Policies" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

27-18-82. Coverage for prescription drugs. -- (a) Every individual or group health insurance contract, or every individual or group hospital or medical expense insurance policy, plan, or group policy issued for delivery, or renewed in this state, on or after January 1, 2015 that provides coverage for prescription drugs shall not require an insured to use, prior to using a brand name prescription drug prescribed by a licensed prescriber, any alternative brand name prescription drugs or over-the-counter drugs.

(b) Health insurance contracts, plans or policies to which this section applies may require an insured to use, prior to using a brand name prescription drug prescribed by a licensed prescriber, a therapeutically equivalent generic drug, unless, pursuant to sections 5-19.1-19, 5-37- 18.1 and 21-31-15(b), the prescriber indicates "brand name necessary" on the prescription form, or if the prescriber gives oral direction to that effect to the dispensing pharmacist.

(c) This section does not apply to insurance coverage providing benefits for: (1) Hospital confinement indemnity; (2) Disability income; (3) Accident only; (4) Long-term care; (5) Medicare supplement; (6) Limited benefit health; (7) Specified disease indemnity; (8) Sickness or bodily injury or death by accident or both; and (9) Other limited benefit policies.

SECTION 2. Chapter 27-19 of the General Laws entitled "Nonprofit Hospital Service Corporations" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

27-19-73. Coverage for prescription drugs. {repeat of 27-18-82}

SECTION 3. Chapter 27-20 of the General Laws entitled "Nonprofit Medical Service Corporations" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

27-20-69. Coverage for prescription drugs. {repeat of 27-18-82}

SECTION 4. Chapter 27-41 of the General Laws entitled "Health Maintenance Organizations" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

27-41-86. Coverage for prescription drugs. {repeat of 27-18-82}

SECTION 5. This act shall take effect upon passage.

	Staff should redraft bill to incorporate Medicare Part D prior notification and appeal process, before formulary changes can be implemented.
	<p><i>4:25 Agenda for the Next Meeting, Linda Ward</i></p> <p>Purpose/Goal: To set the agenda for the next meeting.</p> <p>Discussion: The Legislation Committee meets the 1st Monday 3 - 4:30 PM: 01/05th; 02/02nd; 03/02nd; 04/06th; 05/4th; 06/01st; 07/06th; 08/10th; 09/21st; 11/02nd; and 12/07th.</p>
	<p><i>4:30 Adjournment, Linda Ward</i></p> <p>MOTION: To adjourn at 3:58 PM</p> <p>Motion moved by JR, seconded by AP, passed unanimously</p>

ⁱ § 40-8.7-4 Definitions (3) "Employment Support Services" means activities work including: benefits counseling; supervision; job coaching; vocational evaluation; case management; job development; customized employment; job training; transportation; training; tools; equipment; and technology, subject to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approval.

ⁱⁱ Similar to the multi-state Benefit Bank <http://www.thebenefitbank.org>

The Benefit Bank is a web-based service that simplifies and centralizes the process of applying for many state and federal benefits for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. Through its eligibility screening tool,

The Benefit Bank can ensure that people are fully aware of the benefits to which they are entitled and, as an expert system it helps maximize the benefits and tax refunds they can secure. The "one-stop-shop" concept of The Benefit Bank reduces the amount of time needed to apply for benefits. Further, the information a person enters is stored securely, so an individual who wishes to reapply for benefits, apply for new benefits or file future tax returns simply needs to enter his or her username and password to initiate this new action.

The Benefit Bank is a free service. No consumer can be charged for using The Benefit Bank online service. If an organization provides counselor candidates, a computer, a printer, Internet access and a phone in a setting that is respectful and private, they can offer The Benefit Bank online service. From the start, The Benefit Bank has been structured to assure the privacy and confidentiality of all client data.

Developed for use by a wide range of community based, faith-based, governmental, job-training, healthcare or social service agencies, The Benefit Bank can be part of a community-wide response to poverty. The Benefit Bank not only provides the opportunity to help neighbors but also provides information for organizations to more effectively advocate for policies that better serve their communities. An innovative public-private partnership of state/local governments and a broad, statewide coalition committed to helping neighbors move towards self-sufficiency by utilizing The Benefit Bank, has resulted in tens of millions of dollars being returned each year to low and moderate income individuals and families.