

Janet T. Mills  
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.  
Commissioner



Maine Department of Health and Human Services  
Office of Behavioral Health  
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May 10, 2022

Simonne M. Maline, Executive Director  
Consumer Council System of Maine  
219 Capitol Street, Suite 7  
Augusta, ME 04330

RE: Issue Statement -- Barriers to Career Advancement for People with  
Mental Health Challenges

Dear Ms. Maline:

We are appreciative of the work of the Consumer Council System of Maine (CCSM) to raise concerns about career advancement. DHHS is committed to continuing to support employment and career advancement for individuals living with mental health conditions. Work is an essential part of recovery and as such, should be supported by all services.

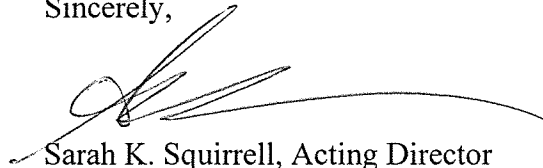
We would welcome the opportunity to engage with the CCSM in collaboration with our partners at the Department of Labor (DOL) – Division of Vocational Services, to discuss areas for improvement with employment services. Your recommendations highlight some specific areas of focus that can guide this discussion.

- Employment services should be grounded in the job-seekers choices, preferences, strengths, and goals. The Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) welcomes the opportunity to learn more from CCSM to address specific services where this is a barrier and strengthen services that excel at person-centered employment services. As many individuals engage in job development through services provided by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, we welcome engagement of our partners on how to best address this for individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services.
- As you are aware, the peer curriculum, Maine Can Work, offers opportunities for peers to support and encourage one another in their pathway to employment and career development. OBH recognizes the need to increase the opportunity for the implementation of Maine Can Work and welcomes collaboration from CCSM on that and related initiatives.
- There is an ongoing need for better resource sharing and communication to support individuals with mental health conditions to attain their educational and career aspirations. OBH will look for ways to improve this through our contracted employment services providers, behavioral health providers, and in collaboration with partners such as the Division of Vocational Services, Career Centers and Workforce Development Boards. Your suggested ideas will be a helpful part of this process.

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As part of our work to increase the opportunities for employment and career advancement for individuals living with mental health conditions as well as fulfilling our obligations of Maine's Employment First statute, we are grateful for your attention to this issue and your input. We look to engage with the CCSM for additional input as we move forward. Leticia Huttman, the OBH Employment and Workforce Development Manager will be in touch with you to set up a meeting.

Sincerely,



Sarah K. Squirrell, Acting Director  
Office of Behavioral Health

SKS/klv

cc: Jeanne M. Lambrew, Commissioner, DHHS