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Department on
Disability Services

PRESS RELEASE

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District of Columbia Selected for Third Consecutive Year as a Core State in U.S. Department of Labor’s NEON Initiative

DDS continues to lead the District’s participation in national effort to expand employment opportunities for residents with mental health and co-occurring disabilities

WASHINGTON, DC — April 27, 2026 — The U.S. Department of Labor has selected the District of Columbia as a “core state” in the National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (NEON) initiative for the third consecutive year. The DC Department on Disability Services (DDS) will continue to manage NEON for the District, leading efforts to expand competitive integrated employment for residents with mental health conditions and co-occurring disabilities.

As the managing agency, DDS will coordinate cross agency partnerships and use NEON’s technical assistance to strengthen employment policies, expand the use of -evidence-based- practices such as Individual Placement and Support (IPS), and improve data-driven employment outcomes.

“DC’s third selection as a NEON core state underscores our commitment to innovation, equity, and meaningful employment for all District residents,” said **Andrew Reese**, Director of the DC Department on Disability Services. ***“DDS is proud to manage this initiative and to continue building a coordinated, modern workforce system that supports people with disabilities in achieving their career goals.”***

During the next three years, DDS will focus on developing a Districtwide strategic plan, strengthening benefits planning services, expanding workforce and provider engagement, increasing AI literacy for staff and job seekers, and improving data collection to support better employment outcomes.

NEON is administered by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy to help states remove barriers to employment and promote sustainable, competitive integrated employment for people with mental health conditions and co-occurring disabilities.

In FY 2025, DDS served more than 2,500 residents through its Developmental Disabilities Administration. The agency's Rehabilitation Services Administration supported more than 5,300 residents, with more than 250 individuals securing employment in high-demand fields such as hospitality, transportation, and healthcare. The District's continued success with the NEON initiative complements Mayor Bowser's support and commitment to an array of initiatives designed to give residents with disabilities a pathway to employment and independence, including:

- The annual Employment First Summit, which brings together businesses, providers, and self-advocates to address the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from being hired for competitive employment.
- The Aspiring Professionals Program, a competitive six-month internship program that exposes residents with disabilities to various professional careers within DC Government.
- Career fair events specifically designed for residents with disabilities to streamline access to employment recruiters.
- The Technology First initiative and annual Tech Summit that educate residents with disabilities and employers about assistive technologies that can ensure fully integrated work environments and enhance employee success and independence on the job and within the community.

Other core states for the NEON initiative include Colorado, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, New York, and Tennessee.

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