

**U.S. AbilityOne Commission
Minutes – Quarterly Public Meeting**

**Thursday, January 23, 2025
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. ET**

I. Call to Order

U.S. AbilityOne Commission Chairperson Jeffrey Koses called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. and greeted the approximately 350 participants attending via Zoom.

II. Chairperson Opening Remarks

Impact of Fires in Los Angeles Area

Koses recognized that some AbilityOne nonprofit agencies (NPAs) had been affected by the catastrophic fires in the Los Angeles area. He said the Commission was committed to the health and safety of AbilityOne employees and their loved ones and stood ready to help as far as it could.

Election of New Chairperson

Koses said February 2025 would mark the end of his second two-year term as Chairperson. On January 17, Robert D. Hogue [was elected](#) as the Commission’s new Chairperson. Koses said Hogue is a superb choice to lead the Commission.

Reflections on Two Terms as Chairperson

Koses said it had been an honor and a privilege to serve as Chairperson. He complimented the work of many Commission staff members and the Office of Inspector General (OIG). He also spoke about two challenges addressed during his tenure:

Implementation of the 898 Panel Recommendations

He discussed the Section 898 “[Panel on Department of Defense and AbilityOne Contracting Oversight, Accountability, and Integrity](#),” established by the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act.

The Panel made 24 recommendations in its [Fourth and Final Report to Congress](#). Action on 21 of those 24 recommendations has now been completed. The remaining three recommendations were recommendations to Congress. Koses said the Commission will continue to work with Congress as it moves forward in crafting recommended changes.

National Council on Disability

In 2020, the National Council on Disability (NCD) issued a report recommending that the AbilityOne Program be phased out over a period of eight years and be replaced with a legislative mandate that all federal contractors hire some minimum percentage of people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

Since that NCD report, the Commission has worked to modernize key aspects of the Program. Koses spoke about the achievements of that modernization work, including the prohibition on payment of subminimum wages on contracts within the AbilityOne Program and the Commission's focus on transparency and engagement.

When NCD issued a 2024 progress report reaffirming NCD's 2020 recommendation, it [missed an opportunity to address or acknowledge](#) the substantive actions the Commission has taken to modernize the Program, Koses said.

Comments by Vice Chairperson and Chairperson-Elect

Commission Vice Chairperson Chai Feldblum praised Koses's leadership and welcomed Chairperson-elect Hogue. Hogue said he is humbled by the opportunity to serve and looks forward to his work as Chairperson.

III. Administrative Remarks and Introductions

Commission Executive Officer Angela Phifer gave administrative remarks. She noted that two American Sign Language interpreters would interpret and that the meeting was being live captioned.

Commission members introduced themselves. Executive Director Kim Zeich and Inspector General Stefania Porter introduced themselves and certain staff members.

Koses noted with regret that Scott R. Calisti, the Commission's Department of the Air Force representative, was about to retire, and that Malcom Shorter, the Commission's Department of Agriculture representative, had left the Commission at the end of the Biden administration on Jan. 20.

IV. Consideration of Minutes

Minutes from the October 24, 2024, quarterly public meeting were approved.

V. Chairperson Additional Remarks

Koses briefly discussed some of what the Commission has achieved since its October 2024 public meeting.

- Commission in December 2024 [signed](#) second-generation Cooperative Agreements with National Industries for the Blind and SourceAmerica, the central nonprofit agencies (CNAs) designated and overseen by the Commission as part of the AbilityOne Program.
- Commission on January 7, 2025, [issued](#) an updated draft of Compliance Policy 51.405, “Employee Career Development,” for public feedback.
- On January 14, Executive Director Zeich held a fireside chat at the 2025 West National Council of SourceAmerica Employers (NCSE) CEO/Senior Leadership Forum, with Deputy Executive Director Amy Jensen, Director of Oversight and Compliance John Konst, and Senior Advisor Brian Hoey in attendance.
 - This event was part of the Commission’s ongoing focus on transparency and public engagement, Koses said.

He said the agency would soon start work on its next strategic plan.

VI. Executive Director Report

Executive Director Kim Zeich gave a [report](#) that included a briefing by Konst on AbilityOne employment in FY 2024.

VII. Inspector General Presentation

Inspector General Stefania Pozzi Porter provided an [update](#) on Office of Inspector General activities.

VIII. Public Engagement Session: Employee Career Development

The Commission had announced that the public engagement session would focus on Employee Career Development and had invited comments and suggestions on the topic.

Feldblum [gave an introduction](#). She noted that a link to [draft Policy 51.405](#) had been posted in the chat.

Jensen moderated the rest of the session, which began with scheduled speakers:

Shane Kanady, Vice President, Workforce Development, SourceAmerica

He said SourceAmerica views Policy 51.405 as a significant milestone for the AbilityOne Program, and he observed that the current version of the policy has addressed many of the areas of concern expressed by the NPA network over the past two years. He described how SourceAmerica will support its NPAs with regard to employee career development.

Soraya Correa, President and Chief Executive Officer, National Industries for the Blind

She discussed NIB's NSITE, which provides a continuum of employment services that connect employers with individuals who are blind or visually impaired and/or veterans. She also described other ways that NIB will support its NPAs with regard to employee career development.

Jesse Shirek, Government Affairs Specialist, National Federation of the Blind

He said the thoughtful approach laid out in draft Policy 51.405 will move blind and significantly disabled individuals working on AbilityOne contracts closer to the goal of competitive integrated employment.

Ann Gillmore, Corporate Vice President, Peckham

Peckham is a SourceAmerica NPA. Gillmore gave feedback on specific elements of draft Policy 51.405, including the experience requirements for "Career Navigator" and "Career Facilitator" and the characterization of "job assessments."

Corbb O'Connor, President, National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota

He said he supported Policy 51.405. To ensure blind people can believe in themselves and their own potential, it is important to give them opportunities to stretch personally and professionally, he said.

Liam Bailey, Corporate Vocational and Compliance Director, ORC Industries

ORC Industries is a SourceAmerica NPA. Bailey said he echoed many of Gillmore's points, including regarding experience requirements. He took issue with a statement in Policy 51.405 that seemed to him unnecessary, namely: "Employee career development is not vocational rehabilitation."

Jeffrey E. Mittman, President and CEO, Bosma Enterprises; President, National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind (NAEPB)

Mittman said there is support across the Program for workforce development, and in fact workforce development is already being done. He said a large number of NAEPB CEOs are blind, and many started as direct labor employees and moved up into different levels of responsibility.

However, he does worry about the additional cost to NPAs, and he thinks Policy 51.405 may have been written in any overly prescriptive manner.

Koses said he had heard a recurrent theme from the scheduled speakers: appreciation for the Commission's policy-making process. The Commission has not rushed to finalize policies but

rather has taken care to socialize them, sometimes seeking multiple rounds of comments, he said. The process is aimed at making sure the agency has the policy right and that the policy is fully understood. He thanked the speakers and encouraged people to submit any additional feedback on Policy 51.405.

Additional speakers were given an opportunity to make comments:

John Pare, Executive Director for Advocacy and Policy, National Federation of the Blind

He reiterated that NFB supports Policy 51.405 as written. Among other things, he said he appreciates the emphasis on employee participation and making sure that the employee gets to drive the process. He said the AbilityOne Program should be proud of having eliminated payment of subminimum wages on AbilityOne contracts.

Glenn Adler, Policy Director, Property Services Division, Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

He said SEIU supports proposed Policy 51.405 and especially applauds sections 6(a)i and 6(a)iv.

Matt Koch, General Manager, Virginia Industries for the Blind

He said it is important to get numbers, not just anecdotes, that capture employee advancement, and compare those numbers to industry-wide numbers.

Jo Sperry, Chief Executive and Inclusion Officer, Peckham

She echoed Koch's remark about the importance of numbers, suggesting that those numbers could rebut perceptions that there isn't career advancement in AbilityOne.

Zeich said this important conversation underscores the importance of data. The Commission is trying to balance the gathering of data with the need to avoid overburdening AbilityOne employers. She said the forms the Commission has been finalizing will help with gathering data.

Richard Davis, Chair of Employee Outreach Subcommittee, Employment Committee, National Federation of the Blind

He believes proposed Policy 51.405 is a modernization that will help give blind people an important steppingstone to upward mobility.

Answering a question from the chat, Zeich said the Commission did not want to prescribe a form for NPAs to use with employee career development, given that many AbilityOne employers have their own forms.

Feldblum said a lot of NPAs have been working on employee career development for some time and have figured out how to do it well.

IX. Announcements

Feldblum and two other private-citizen Commission members, Bryan Bashin and Gabe Cazares, said the President had requested their resignation from the AbilityOne Commission.

They spoke about what the agency had achieved during their tenure and thanked the many people who had helped them gain understanding about the AbilityOne Program, its value, and its employees.

X. Concluding Remarks

Koses thanked the meeting participants. He also thanked the departing private citizens and spoke about what he had learned from them. He said he is optimistic about the AbilityOne Program.

Meeting Attendees

Approximately 350 people attended, including:

Commission Members

Jeffrey Koses, Chairperson	General Services Administration
Chai Feldblum, Vice Chairperson	Private Citizen
Bryan Bashin	Private Citizen
Chris Brandt	Private Citizen
Gabe Cazares	Private Citizen
Matthew R. Beebe	Department of Defense
Scott R. Calisti	Department of the Air Force
Megan Dake	Department of the Army
Carol L. Dobak	Department of Education
Robert D. Hogue	Department of the Navy
Tara Jamison	Department of Justice
Jennifer Sheehy	Department of Labor
Virna Winters	Department of Commerce

Scheduled Speakers

Shane Kanady

Soraya Correa

Jesse Shirek

Ann Gillmore

Corbb O'Connor

Liam Bailey

Jeff Mittman

SourceAmerica

National Industries for the Blind

National Federation of the Blind

Peckham

National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota

ORC Industries

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