

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

**Thursday, January 25, 2024
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. ET**

I. Call to Order and Introductions

U.S. AbilityOne Commission Chairperson Jeffrey Koses called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. and greeted the nearly 300 participants attending via Zoom.

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.

Koses introduced Danté Q. Allen, who had recently been confirmed by the Senate as Commissioner, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Allen said as RSA Commissioner he wants to engage in conversations with the communities that RSA serves.

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

II. Consideration of Minutes

Minutes from the October 12, 2023, virtual public meeting were approved.

III. Chairperson Opening Remarks

Koses discussed five big-picture objectives for the Commission in 2024:

1. Finalizing and implementing the competition rule

Introducing competition among AbilityOne nonprofit agencies (NPAs) for the very highest-dollar service contracts has been a top priority for some of AbilityOne’s Federal customers.

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

The Commission opened a rulemaking process in March 2023, publishing the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) “[Supporting Competition in the AbilityOne Program](#),” which received almost 100 public comments. The agency extended the public comment period from 60 to 90 days in response to requests for more time.

The agency engaged with stakeholders, meeting with hundreds of NPA leaders at the SourceAmerica Xforce conference, and holding a two-hour extended public engagement session at the Commission's July quarterly public meeting.

Koses said the Commission had arrived at a draft final rule and reached the interagency consultation phase.

2. Establishing next-generation cooperative agreements with the CNAs

After providing some background on the Commission's original cooperative agreements with its designated Central Nonprofit Agencies (CNAs) – National Industries for the Blind and SourceAmerica – Koses said the next-generation agreements will continue the agency's focus on effective governance and good and optimal jobs across the Program.

The agreements will be informed by regulatory and policy work the agency has done in the past two years.

They will also address the Commission's data-collection needs.

3. Data collection

Outdated perceptions of the Program persist amongst many, inside and outside the Federal government. Having solid data is essential if the Commission is to address these misconceptions while building new job opportunities in the Program.

Several data-related initiatives are in progress or on the horizon:

- [Updating PLIMS](#) (Procurement List Information Management System), the Commission's central data system

- Part of smart data collection is [streamlining and simplifying](#). Commission took steps in that direction in September 2023 when it [proposed a new Participating Employee Eligibility form](#). The agency also explained in [Policy 51.403](#) that it will accept certain certifications provided by other government agencies, which will streamline documentation requirements for individuals employed through the Program.

- Other efforts around data collection include updating the Representations and Certifications form.

- The Commission continues to follow the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act.

4. Federal Partnerships

Commission sees Federal partnerships as key to increasing employment within and beyond the AbilityOne Program.

The Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) [October 2020 memo](#) covered the AbilityOne Representative (ABOR) program and agency pledges.

The memo also addressed Federal hiring opportunities (“Hire at Home”) – encouraging agencies to identify possible hiring opportunities in their acquisition workforce for people with disabilities. Such hiring opportunities would be discussed in the public engagement session, Koses said.

5. Legislative Proposals

In 2023, the Commission submitted three legislative proposals to its Congressional committees of jurisdiction.

Chief among these was a proposal to receive pilot project authority, which would enable the Commission to conduct pilots at lower contract ratios. The Commission has built awareness of the proposals and had many good conversations about them with Hill staffers.

Koses concluded his opening remarks.

IV. Remembrance: Andrés Gallegos

Commission Vice Chairperson Chai Feldblum remembered the highly regarded disability rights attorney Andrés Gallegos (1960 – 2023), who had served as Chairman of the National Council on Disability beginning in January 2021.

V. Subcommittee Updates

Regulations & Policy Subcommittee

Feldblum, who chairs the subcommittee, [gave an update](#).

Enterprise Risk Management Subcommittee

Trevor Tullie, the Commission’s Acting Chief Financial Officer, [gave an update](#).

Performance Management

Commission member Jennifer Sheehy, who chairs the subcommittee, [gave an update](#).

VI. Chairperson’s Award

Koses [presented](#) the Chairperson’s Exceptional Service Award to William “Bill” Sproule, Chief, Installation Support for U.S. Air Force Contracting, and Air Force ABOR.

Koses said Sproule’s passionate advocacy of AbilityOne had had a profound impact on the Program. Sproule pioneered the concept of an ABOR and laid the foundation for the Air Force ABOR program, which was the inspiration and model for the current government-wide ABOR program. Sproule also served as a key participant in the Section 898 Panel.

Commission Member Scott R. Calisti – the Commission’s Air Force representative – spoke about Sproule’s contributions to the Air Force and to AbilityOne. Zeich said Sproule had been a “torch bearer” for AbilityOne within the Air Force and Department of Defense.

VII. Executive Director Report

Executive Director Kim Zeich gave a [report](#), including on:

- Key Commission accomplishments in FY 2024 Q1
- Planned activities in FY 2024 Q2

As part of the Executive Director Report, John Konst, Director, Oversight & Compliance, gave a [report](#) on the FY 2023 AbilityOne Program preliminary results.

VIII. Presentation by Inspector General

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

IX. Public Engagement Session: Pathways from AbilityOne Program Employment to Federal Government Employment

The public engagement topic for the meeting was “Pathways from AbilityOne Program Employment to Federal Government Employment.” Addressing this topic were two panels – one composed of individuals involved with disability hiring at Federal agencies, and the other composed of Federal employees who were previously AbilityOne employees.

Commission Deputy Executive Director Amy Jensen moderated.

Federal Partners Panel

Dexter Brooks, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Office of Federal Operations

Brooks discussed aspects of EEOC work including its authority to enforce the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and its work to ensure that the Federal government is a model and leader in providing employment for people with disabilities.

Akinyemi Banjo, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

Banjo discussed aspects of ODEP's work including the [Workforce Recruitment Program \(WRP\)](#) and the [Federal Exchange on Employment and Disability](#). He discussed [Schedule A hiring authority](#).

Christopher White, Internal Revenue Service, Human Capital Office

White discussed how the IRS approaches hiring people with disabilities and people with targeted disabilities, as well as veterans, including use of virtual hiring events and the Workforce Recruitment Program and partnering with the Dept. of Veterans Affairs.

Following the remarks by the three panelists, Koses asked about efforts to bring people with disabilities into Federal positions other than acquisition. He also asked about areas where the panelists were seeing high success or seeing the greatest challenges.

Brooks said different agencies look to people with disabilities for different kinds of positions.

Bashin asked about the WRP database and whether there is data about how many hires can be attributed to it.

Banjo said it is an ongoing challenges to get hiring managers, and people hired, to report when a hire is effectuated with the assistance of the WRP database.

Feldblum talked about the distinction between "disabilities" and "targeted disabilities." She said that AbilityOne employees would count as people with targeted disabilities and that AbilityOne employees who want a Federal job constitute an important talent pool for the Federal government.

She also asked the panelists for their recommendations on ways to create and enhance pathways for AbilityOne employees who want to be considered for a Federal job.

White said it is key for job seekers to have really good résumés. He recommended that job seekers consider participating in résumé-preparation and interview courses.

Brooks said it is important for candidates with disabilities to highlight their specific skills. Federal agencies are looking to quickly hire people with specific skill sets, so an initiative to match potential employees' skills to agency needs could be valuable.

Feldblum invited people from CNAs and NPAs who have ideas on potentially fruitful partnerships to reach out.

Zeich thanked the panelists for their remarks and suggestions, and reiterated Feldblum's observation that the Commission wants to keep the conversation going.

Federal Employees Panel

Several Federal employees who had previously been AbilityOne employees described their career journeys.

Rosa Phares said she began working with the AbilityOne NPA PCSI in 2010, initially as a supply clerk. She worked her way up to a warehouse specialist, and later became a quality control manager. She spent 13 years with PCSI in total, and she still misses the structure that PCSI provided. Now she works in the same building but as a government employee managing inventories.

Henry Orozco also worked for PCSI, an experience that gave him the training he now uses as an industrial marine mechanic leader. He now supervises a team of 20.

Kimberly Martz is also a former PCSI employee. Her boss at PCSI was very supportive of her efforts to advance professionally, and now she works for the Federal government.

Koses and Bashin thanked the panelists for their remarks. Bashin asked the panelists if they had worked with state vocational rehabilitation systems, but they didn't think so.

Sheehy thanked the panelists for telling their stories, which, she thinks, will encourage other people interested in pursuing professional dreams in the Federal government or elsewhere. She asked if the panelists had advice for people who might be nervous about starting a job search.

Orozco said having a good résumé is important, and that it is important not to give up. Martz said people interested in pursuing professional dreams should "go for it." Phares said, "Don't let your disability hold you back."

Commission member Christina Brandt asked Phares to elaborate on the structure she missed from PCSI. Phares and the other panelist said that at PCSI they had felt welcome to ask for accommodations they needed because of their disabilities.

In response to a question by Feldblum, the panelists mentioned specific individuals at PCSI who had helped with their transition to government jobs.

The public engagement session ended, allowing for discussion in response to comments.

Jewelyn Cosgrove, Vice President, Government and Public Relations at Melwood, talked about Melwood collaboration with the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency to give that agency the tools to be a supportive employer.

Zeich returned to the topic of the first panel and asked Akinyemi Banjo to talk a little bit more about the Schedule A hiring process, which he did. Sheehy and Feldblum offered additional insights.

In response to comments in the chat, Zeich and Feldblum discussed next steps for the Commission's [Proposed Participating Employee Eligibility Form](#), a planned second form, and certain policies.

In response to a question in the chat, Feldblum talked about qualification requirements for the Schedule A hiring process.

X. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, Koses encouraged people to use the chat to suggest future public engagement topics. He thanked all participants and adjourned the meeting.

Meeting Attendees

Nearly 300 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
Scott Calisti	Department of the Air Force
Gabe Cazares	Private Citizen
Megan Dake	Department of the Army
Carol Dobak	Department of Education
Robert Hogue	Department of the Navy
Tara Jamison	Department of Justice
Jennifer Sheehy	Department of Labor
Malcom Shorter	Department of Agriculture
Virna Winters	Department of Commerce

Scheduled Speakers

Akinyemi Banjo	Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor
Dexter Brooks	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Kimberly Martz	Former AbilityOne employee
Henry Orozco	Former AbilityOne employee
Rosa Phares	Former AbilityOne employee
Christopher White	Internal Revenue Service