

What Maine Leaders Are Saying About Efforts to Support Employment for Maine People with Disabilities

“We must remove the disincentives to full and integrated employment for citizens with disabilities. We have to figure out how to allow people to keep their health insurance when they go to work. We have to figure out how to reconfigure Medicaid so that service provider agencies can bill more for employment related services and less for non-employment related day programming services. We look forward to a federal-state partnership with Senator King. With all of us working together, I know we can improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.”

- Kim Moody, Executive Director, Disability Rights Maine

“Today, we have Maine people with disabilities who could be and want to be fully engaged in the workforce. When they are not, it is a loss for them, and a loss for Maine’s economy, which is why we are grateful that Senator King is leading this important discussion. Expanding opportunities for people with disabilities is in the state’s economic best interest and is an effort Maine businesses are proud to support.”

- Dana Connors, President and CEO, Maine State Chamber of Commerce

“Maine needs all residents, especially people with disabilities, to access meaningful employment. Our goal at the Maine Department of Labor is to work with our federal and private-sector partners to connect employers with employees to the benefit of both. We are focusing on what people can do, not what they can’t.”

- Jeanne Paquette, Commissioner, Maine Department of Labor

“Senator Angus King’s leadership on issues of employment among Maine people with disabilities is crucial. As many Maine businesses and government agencies collaborate to foster change, it is all under the canopy of federal law, such as the Social Security Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the like. Senator King’s energetic involvement gives the entire effort a new dimension of leadership in that regard.”

- Ed Kane, Vice President, Maine, Harvard Pilgrim

“As a person with a psychiatric disability, as well as a professional individual and systemic disability-rights advocate, I deeply appreciate Senator King’s action plan for addressing the range of issues contributing to Maine’s high rate of unemployment for its citizens with disabilities. Senator King continues his commitment demonstrated as Maine’s Governor to listening to people with disabilities ourselves, along with our allies, in an inclusive effort to address and remove society’s barriers to benefiting from the talents and skills of our state and nation’s untapped work-force.”

- Cathy Bustin, Advocate, Disability Rights Maine

“As the leading provider of private disability insurance, Unum focuses intensely on return to work assistance. We appreciate the importance in keeping pace with advances in technology and our evolving workforce. This topic is important and Senator King’s forum is timely.”

- Scott Maker, Senior Vice President and Deputy General Counsel, Unum

What Maine Leaders Are Saying About Efforts to Support Employment for Maine People with Disabilities

"KFI is eager to partner with Senator King and other allies in Maine to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. As a provider of employment supports to people often characterized as having the most significant impact of disability, I can attest to the fact that many people with disabilities WANT to work, can OBTAIN meaningful employment, and can CONTRIBUTE greatly to their workplaces and communities. We must find ways in which the disincentives created by federal programs such as SSDI meant to protect disabled workers are mitigated for the benefit of workers with disabilities and the businesses which are growing increasingly dependent upon their skills and abilities."

- Gail Fanjoy, Executive Director, Katahdin Friends Inc.

"As someone living with Cerebral Palsy and having 44 years of personal and professional experiences with disability issues, I applaud Senator King's efforts in learning from those of us on the ground about the actual experiences of Maine people with disabilities in regards to employment.

"I am so grateful that the Americans with Disabilities Act exists. However, I believe that there is still a prevailing assumption by many Americans that people with disabilities need to be 'taken care of' and therefore can't contribute meaningfully to society. Nothing could be further from the truth but this is an assumption that many of us fight against every day and it is an assumption that I feel is currently reflected in the current rules of many government programs designed to assist people with disabilities.

"I believe that Senator King understands this and I look forward to working with him on a journey to true equality."

- Avery Olmstead, Disability Activist

"I appreciate the leadership role Senator King and his staff are initiating to better understand the challenges for Mainers living with a disability.

"Maine AgrAbility, a statewide outreach of University of Maine Cooperative Extension, provides resources to assist agricultural workers, farmers, fishermen and loggers living and working with a disability or chronic illness.

"With increased awareness and development of funding streams and partnership opportunities, Maine AgrAbility, along with other state agencies, can make a difference for people with disabilities, providing a better chance to live independently with enhanced quality of life and improved financial sustainability."

- Richard Brzowski, Project Director, Maine AgrAbility

"Recently Deaf people from around the country protested in Washington DC the lack of employment options for Deaf people. We are happy that Senator King is hearing our cries for policy change at the federal level to increase training and knowledge understanding how to work with Deaf people and DA people."

- Michelle Ames, Advocate & Peer Support Group Coordinator, Disability Rights Maine

What Maine Leaders Are Saying About Efforts to Support Employment for Maine People with Disabilities

“The mission of Maine Medical Center’s Department of Vocational Services is to contribute to the health and wealth of the community by supporting individuals to overcome barriers and achieve meaningful employment. Our vision is to provide leadership and promote systemic change by delivering quality vocational services, fostering access, and creating community alliances that support people.

“We have been working to assist people with disabilities in Maine to obtain and advance in employment for decades. One way we do this is by providing Benefits Counseling Services, also known as Work Incentives Planning and Assistance; we are specifically trained on Social Security’s work rules, and talk daily with Social Security disability beneficiaries who want to work. They are concerned about losing their financial and health insurance safety net while they work.

“Over ten percent of Maine’s working-age population receives a disability benefit from the Social Security Administration. At the same time, Maine is facing an imminent workforce shortage. Considering that medical and behavioral health treatment in 2015 looks much different than it did when Social Security disability was created in 1956, there is a need for state, federal, and private disability benefit systems to collectively redefine the all-or-nothing nature of eligibility for benefits when a beneficiary works. Senator King’s leadership on this topic is timely and necessary for Maine to mobilize this skilled and able workforce.”

- Jennifer Kimble, Operations Manager, Department of Vocational Services, Maine Medical Center

“We are honored that Senator King is working to advance employment services for citizens with disabilities. His efforts align nicely with the work we have been doing in collaboration with Maine DHHS, Maine DOL and the hundreds of employment specialists and job coaches across the state to provide training, technical assistance, mentoring and support so they have the skills and knowledge they need to support meaningful career and job development for Maine citizens with disabilities. Additionally, the work of the Employment First Maine Coalition is widely respected across the country and we are pleased to be continuing to work with the US Department of Labor’s Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program to advance employment as a first and preferred service option; Senator King’s proposal to reform the SSDI program will greatly enhance our efforts.”

- Debbie Gilmer, Executive Director, Syntiro

“I am impressed that Sen King has a good grasp of some of the most important barriers for people with disabilities to being successful with employment. I hope that the ideas discussed can be implemented to better the lives of people living with disabilities and those who employ them.”

- Simonne Maline, Executive Director, Consumer Council System of Maine