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EDITOR'S PICK

Bentley announces summit on disability employment

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BIRMINGHAM — Gov. Robert Bentley on Friday joined Alabama Labor Commissioner Fitzgerald Washington and Alabama Mental Health Commissioner Jim Perdue to announce a statewide employment summit for Alabamians with disabilities.

The Governor's Summit on Disability Employment, scheduled for October, is designed to connect companies with individuals with disabilities who are unemployed or under employed despite their ability, desire, and willingness to work.

"I firmly believe having an opportunity for a quality job should be open for everyone, including Alabamians with a disability," Bentley said. "This Summit on Disability Employment will bring together agencies, organizations, commissions and most importantly the consumers to address the disparaging gap in unemployment for those with disabilities. Disabled Alabamians are part of the dedicated Alabama workforce, and are a great partner to help companies be successful."

Statistics from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey and the American Community Survey shows the employment rate of working-age people (ages 21 to 64) with disabilities in Alabama is 27.2 percent, but the percentage of people working without a disability is 73.3 percent. There are more than 84,000 Alabamians with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64 that are unemployed or under-employed.

"The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Vocational Rehabilitation program has placed more than 4,500 individuals with disabilities into jobs this past year," Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Commissioner Cary F. Boswell said. "ADRS is also maintaining more than 1,700 partnerships with several Alabama businesses with an interest in disability and hiring. We are looking forward to partnering with other agencies to address this on-going issue."

The summit will combine the innovative ideas from the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, Alabama Department of Mental Health and the Alabama Department of Labor with businesses that are committed to recruitment, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities.

“Employment for ALL Alabamians is a top priority,” Alabama Department of Labor Secretary Fitzgerald Washington said. “It is our mission to help our people find the best jobs they can, and we intend to fulfill this mission. There are so many opportunities in this state, for people of all abilities. We encourage Alabama’s employers to assist us in this effort, and to open their doors to those who too often see them closed.”

In November, the Alabama Department of Labor held a similar summit that focused on increasing Veteran hiring in Alabama. The Governor’s Summit of Alabama Employers for Veterans brought together industry leaders, state and federal officials and trade groups. The goal was to discuss best practices and workable ideas that could resolve high unemployment among veterans. During the summit, more than 50 employers participated to help Veterans locate jobs.

Additional details on the Governor’s Summit on Disability Employment will be released at a later date.

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