Employment First

People with disabilities can perform meaningful work, while also receiving fair wages equal to their counterparts without disabilities. Employment First is a framework for systemic change that is centered on the premise that people with disabilities are capable of the same work as those without disabilities.

What Is Employment First?
Employment First is a policy that prioritizes competitive and integrated settings for working age people with disabilities as the first and preferred outcome without removing other alternative options of support that currently exist. Competitive integrated employment is defined as work paid by the employers at minimum wage or greater in a typical work setting where the employee with a disability interacts with coworkers without disabilities. Employment is a fundamental aspect of the person’s life and helps promote self-identity, self-confidence, self-determination and economic self-sufficiency.

Missouri’s Current Employment Policies

- As of 2017, 34 percent of all working age people with disabilities in Missouri were employed, and 25 percent of people with a cognitive or intellectual disability were employed.
- A recent study found that 51 percent of Missourians with disabilities without a job would like one.
- In 2011, the Missouri Department of Developmental Disabilities issued an Employment First departmental policy that would apply only to people with developmental disabilities.
- In 2017, people who were placed through supported employment had an average annual increase in wages of $13,156.

Employment First in Other States

- Currently, 30 states have an official Employment First policy.
- Washington was the first state to adopt an Employment First policy.
  - Nearly 90 percent of working age adults with disabilities are in an integrated employment setting.

Recommendations
The Missouri Legislature should support HB 1276, to increase competitive and integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Missouri legislators need to follow the trend towards inclusivity for people with disabilities by prioritizing “Employment First” and supporting policies that increase competitive integrated employment.