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State of Alaska strives to be model employer of people with disabilities

Workplace survey finds good hiring, training, retention; always room to improve

ANCHORAGE — An anonymous survey of state employees found that the state has done a good job of hiring workers with disabilities, said a recent report from the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education.

The 2011 survey aimed to measure how well Alaskans with disabilities are represented among state employees, how well they are supported, and how better to support them.

Nearly a quarter of the state's approximately 18,000 employees responded; 16 percent reported having a disability as defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Amendments Act of 2008.

"We found that the number of state employees with disabilities mirrors the general population," said Teresa Holt, executive director of the Governor's Council. "And the state of Alaska does a fairly good job when it comes to hiring, training and retaining qualified persons with disabilities."

Holt said the state could further its support of employees with disabilities by:

- Improving training for managers and supervisors around the ADA
- Educating workers about their rights and responsibilities under the ADA

"We can always do better," Holt said. "Qualified new hires with disabilities or existing employees who acquire a disability need support to work to the best of their abilities."

The state of Alaska is committed to the idea that people with disabilities are valued members of the workforce. Gov. Sean Parnell issued a proclamation celebrating Disability Employment Awareness Month last September, and established a State as a Model Employer Task Force to increase the number of qualified applicants with disabilities for state positions, and provide better, cost-effective accommodation. One strategy: qualified candidates with a disability may apply with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for positions that aren't open to the general public. They must successfully perform the position's duties for four months before being permanently hired.

The Task Force consists of members from the Governor's Council, the state divisions of Personnel and Labor Relations and of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Alaska's Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator's office.

The report and the proclamation are at www.dhss.alaska.gov/GCDSE.

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