

1 **Texas HireAbility Campaign: Revision and Implementation of the We Hire**
2 **Ability Employer Recognition Program**
3 **Discussion Paper**
4

5 **Background**

6 The Texas HireAbility campaign raises awareness among employers about the benefits of hiring
7 individuals with disabilities. The campaign is now in its fifth year and coincides with National
8 Disability Employment Awareness Month each October. During the annual Texas HireAbility
9 campaign, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and its partners feature resources for
10 employers and conduct a statewide series of awareness activities and hiring events for job
11 seekers with disabilities. Activities are conducted primarily in October but may also take place in
12 other months, depending on the event.

13 On May 21, 2019, TWC’s three-member Commission (Commission) approved the creation of an
14 enhanced employer recognition strategy, the We Hire Ability Employer Recognition Program
15 (We Hire Ability), to acknowledge employers for their partnership and commitment to an
16 inclusive workforce and to encourage adoption of similar practices among other employers in the
17 same industry or community. Like the Texas HireAbility campaign, We Hire Ability is intended
18 to raise awareness among employers and increase hiring of individuals with disabilities. The
19 program will build a community of employers that can learn from one another and demonstrate
20 how other businesses may adopt effective practices for attracting, hiring, retaining, and
21 advancing individuals with disabilities throughout Texas. Through positive peer engagement, We
22 Hire Ability employers can influence industry peers by sharing their practices and demonstrating
23 the benefits resulting from inclusive workplaces.

24 To qualify for recognition, employers must attest that 10 percent of their Texas-based employees
25 are individuals with disabilities and that these individuals are working in competitive, integrated
26 employment (CIE). To meet CIE criteria, employees with disabilities must be working:

- 27 • at minimum wage or above;
28 • in a position typically found in the community;
29 • as part of an integrated work unit in which they work alongside non-disabled peers; and
30 • full- or part-time, with part-time being at least 15 hours per week.

31 The We Hire Ability nomination process will also gather information on the employer’s
32 initiatives, including examples of how the employer recruits and hires individuals with
33 disabilities and the employer’s strategies to create inclusive workplaces that support retention
34 and advancement of employees with disabilities.

35 Increasing hiring and employment for individuals with disabilities is an overarching
36 organizational goal for TWC and its Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Division, and employers are
37 a vital partner in helping the agency to achieve this mission. By honoring and recognizing
38 employers that hire, retain, and advance the careers of individuals with disabilities at a level of
39 10 percent among their workforce, We Hire Ability sets a high standard, above the 7 percent
40 federal standard for contractors. This benchmark is appropriate and achievable for the many
41 Texas employers with diversity and inclusion programs, as well as those that aspire to develop
42 such programs.

43 We Hire Ability was announced during the Texas HireAbility Employer Forum in El Paso on
44 October 2, 2019. The program’s implementation, originally scheduled for March 2020, was

1 delayed and rescheduled for 2021 due to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and
2 the resulting focus of many Texas employers on business continuity and recovery.

3 **Issue: Need for Revision to the Nomination Process and Recognition Cycle**

4 The original proposal approved by the Commission in 2019 allowed employers to nominate
5 themselves or be nominated by Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards), local VR
6 management, or a local mayoral or county committee that works in partnership with the Texas
7 Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities. Additionally, the Commission approved that
8 every October it would recognize up to 100 employers that met the established criteria during
9 that year by recognizing those employers with a We Hire Ability decal and a certificate. The
10 decal would be displayed at their business location, and an electronic decal would be provided
11 for the employer’s use on its website and social media. Employers would be required to reapply
12 for the We Hire Ability decal each year.

13 In the subsequent months since Commission approval, staff has continued to review
14 opportunities to strengthen the We Hire Ability recognition strategy to ensure that both
15 recognition efforts and associated resources are provided in a manner that will maximize TWC’s
16 efforts to promote employment of individuals with disabilities. Key to the success of the We Hire
17 Ability strategy is having sufficient time to develop a cohort of recognized employers that can
18 champion and inspire other employers to not only hire individuals with disabilities and
19 implement inclusive workplace practices but also develop and disseminate resources that can
20 assist employers with these efforts.

21 In preparation for We Hire Ability implementation in spring 2021, staff has identified potential
22 improvements, including:

- 23 • opening nominations for the We Hire Ability recognition decal every other year, instead
24 of every year, thus extending the time the decal is in effect. (For example, instead of a
25 2021 We Hire Ability decal, the decal would be for 2021-2022).
 - 26 ○ For the 2021–2022 biennium, nominations for We Hire Ability recognition would
27 open on April 1, 2021, and close on September 30, 2021. Recognition decals issued
28 for the 2021–2022 cycle would be valid through the end of Calendar Year 2022.
 - 29 ○ For the 2023–2024 biennium and in each biennium thereafter, nominations would
30 open in January and remain open through June in the first year of the two-year period.
- 31 • investing, during the biennial recognition period, in the development of partnerships with
32 recognized We Hire Ability employers to better achieve the HireAbility goal to collect,
33 promote and disseminate best practices, and to share and promote resources and
34 practices that build inclusive workplaces;
- 35 • providing all employers that meet the We Hire Ability criteria with a decal immediately
36 upon verification rather than waiting until an annual recognition event and rather than
37 limiting it to 100 employers, as originally proposed; and
- 38 • conducting special awareness activities and events each October during National
39 Disability Employment Awareness Month, featuring the strategies and effective
40 practices of recognized We Hire Ability employers.

41 A biennial recognition cycle will allow for a longer time to develop mutually beneficial and
42 longer-lasting partnerships as well as create multiple opportunities to secure the recognized
43 employers’ participation in planned promotions of a We Hire Ability employer. Promotional
44 activities may include participating in a recognition ceremony; appearing in an announcement
45 video; authoring byline or profile articles; making presentations at relevant conferences; and
46 participating in webinars, online national dialogues, and additional outreach to other employers.

1 **Decision Points**

2 Staff seeks direction on the following:

- 3 • Establishing the We Hire Ability Employer Recognition Program as a biennial
4 recognition;
- 5 • Recognizing employers with the We Hire Ability decal as soon as their applications are
6 validated and recognizing as many employers as meet the criteria; and
- 7 • Conducting special awareness activities and events each October during National
8 Disability Employment Awareness Month, featuring the strategies and effective practices
9 of recognized We Hire Ability employers.