

**U.S. AbilityOne Commission
Minutes – Quarterly Public Meeting**

**Thursday, April 25, 2024
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. ET**

I. Call to Order and Introductions

U.S. AbilityOne Commission Chairperson Jeffrey Koses called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. and greeted the more than 230 participants attending via Zoom.

Commission Executive Officer Angela Phifer gave administrative remarks. She noted that two American Sign Language interpreters would interpret and that the meeting was being live captioned.

Commission members introduced themselves. Executive Director Kim Zeich and Inspector General Stefania Porter introduced themselves and staff members.

II. Consideration of Minutes

Minutes from the January 25, 2024, quarterly public meeting were approved.

III. Recognition – Kevin Lynch

Chairperson Koses spoke about the achievements of Kevin Lynch, who was retiring as President and CEO of National Industries for the Blind (NIB), after serving in that position since 2008. Zeich, Porter, SourceAmerica President and CEO Richard Belden, and incoming NIB President and CEO Soraya Correa also recognized Lynch.

IV. Chairperson Opening Remarks

Koses gave an overview of the Commission’s [2024 Report to the President](#).

He then gave a [update](#) on the status of the recommendations made by the Section 898 “[Panel on Department of Defense and AbilityOne Contracting Oversight, Accountability, and Integrity](#),” established by the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act.

The Commission delivered on one of the Panel’s top recommendations when the agency published the final rule “[Supporting Competition in the AbilityOne Program](#).”

V. Competition Final Rule

Koses, Feldblum and Zeich [gave a briefing](#) on the final rule “[Supporting Competition in the AbilityOne Program](#),” which was published on March 22, 2024, and took effect on April 22, 2024.

VI. Regulations & Policy Subcommittee Update

Feldblum, who chairs the subcommittee, gave an [update](#).

VII. Executive Director Report

Executive Director Kim Zeich gave a [report](#).

Following up on Feldblum's and Zeich's reports, Koses emphasized that, during compliance policy modernization, the Commission is prioritizing engagement with stakeholders.

The compliance policy modernization work is driving the Program forward to meet the needs of Federal agencies – the best way to ensure the growth of good jobs across the Program, he said.

He said data will become increasingly important to the management of the Program. The Commission is trying to ensure that it has the right data and information to rebut misinformation and misconceptions about the Program.

VIII. Path to New Cooperative Agreements

Shelly Hammond, the Commission's Director of Contracting and Policy, gave an [update](#) on the path to new cooperative agreements between the Commission and its central nonprofit agencies (CNAs), NIB and SourceAmerica.

IX Presentation by Inspector General

Inspector General Stefania Pozzi Porter provided an [update](#) on Office of Inspector General activities.

X. Public Engagement Session:

The Commission had [announced](#) that the public engagement session would cover two topics: (1) how digital accessibility and technology can support individuals who are blind or have disabilities in their jobs, and (2) how technology advances can support employee career development activities.

Zeich gave an [overview](#) of public engagement session and the two sets of panelists scheduled to speak.

Panel 1: Experts from government, advocacy community, and AbilityOne employers

Commission Workforce Development Program Manager Bradley Crain moderated the panel.

Dr. Sachin Dev Pavithran, Executive Director, U.S. Access Board

Pavithran gave an overview of the [U.S. Access Board](#), including its work under section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. He also talked about the [findings](#) of the 2023 Government-wide Section 508 Assessment.

Mark Riccobono, President, National Federation of the Blind (NFB)

Riccobono said inaccessible technology continues to be a significant barrier to blind people’s participation in society, especially employment.

He said employers often delegate accessibility verification to their employees with disabilities, adding those duties on top of the employees’ regular responsibilities and without additional compensation. Employers don’t always prioritize giving employees with disabilities ongoing training on new technologies – instead making the employees responsible for keeping up with innovations on their own time.

But he said there is some good news: There is growing understanding within the business and tech communities about the importance of accessibility.

Kyle Johnson, CEO, Lighthouse Works

Lighthouse Works is an NIB-affiliated nonprofit agency in Florida that has a significant amount of call center work. They built a software-development team, which creates what they call “middleware” – software that sits between Lighthouse Works and a customer to make the workflow accessible, sometimes eliminating inefficiencies at the same time.

Guest Speaker: Jennifer Mathis, Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, Department of Justice

Mathis discussed the DOJ’s [final rule](#) “Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability; Accessibility of Web Information and Services of State and Local Government Entities,” published in the Federal Register on April 24, 2024.

She pointed out that a [Fact Sheet](#) about the rule was available on ADA.gov.

Panel 2: Experts from the for-profit sector

Commission Deputy Executive Director Amy Jensen moderated the panel. She observed that the participation of panel speakers did not imply the Commission’s endorsement of any specific product, brand or service.

Regina Kline, Principal, Enable Ventures / SmartJob, LLC

She said Enable Ventures is a private-market venture capital firm that invests in closing the disability wealth gap and supports new and emerging accessible, inclusive and assistive technologies. She described the firm's vision and its interest in supporting entrepreneurs with disabilities.

Tiffany Meehan, Vice President, Inclusively

Inclusively is an employment platform and tech solution that helps candidates with disabilities identify and request accommodations that boost success and productivity before a job interview, during the interview, and in the job itself. Meehan discussed aspects of Inclusively's work, including how it uses tech to empower candidates with disabilities, such as through an AI-powered chat function.

Byran Dai, Co-Founder and CEO, Daivergent

He said Daivergent is a technology startup whose work includes providing coaching for job seekers and workers who are neuro-divergent. He described how Daivergent uses technology to tailor and remotely provide services to people who are neuro-divergent.

In the question-and-answer period, Feldblum asked Dai if there was a cost for people with disabilities who accessed Daivergent's services, and he said no.

Meehan said Inclusively was free for the user.

Commission private citizen member Bryan Bashin raised the question of whether it was time to require a formal digital accessibility policy at each AbilityOne NPA.

Kline said that in Enable Ventures's ecosystem, accessibility is taken to be a fundamental factor in whether companies are worth investing in. She said that certain private sector start-ups build accessibility into their product roadmaps, and raised the question of what Federal programs can do in this regard.

Zeich read a few questions from the meeting's chat.

One question asked how intergovernmental support agreements impact AbilityOne. Zeich said the Commission would circle back on that. She also observed that one of the reasons that the Commission thought the competition rule would help AbilityOne was that it is a tool that can be

offered to customers who might otherwise use intergovernmental support agreements to seek services outside of AbilityOne.

She noted that the Commission’s General Counsel had used the meeting’s chat to answer questions about price-impasse situations and how the threshold for competition is calculated.

Feldblum said it would be great if Federal agencies turned to AbilityOne to do their 508 compliance. She also hopes that AbilityOne can be seen as a generator of innovation.

XI. Concluding Remarks

Koses encouraged people to suggest future public engagement topics for Commission quarterly public meetings. He thanked all participants and adjourned the meeting.

Meeting Attendees

More than 230 people attended, including:

Commission Members

Jeffrey Koses, Chairperson	General Services Administration
Chai Feldblum, Vice Chairperson	Private Citizen
Bryan Bashin	Private Citizen
Matthew Beebe	Department of Defense
Chris Brandt	Private Citizen
Gabe Cazares	Private Citizen
Carol Dobak	Department of Education
Robert Hogue	Department of the Navy
Jennifer Sheehy	Department of Labor
Malcom Shorter	Department of Agriculture
Virna Winters	Department of Commerce

Scheduled Speakers

Byran Dai	Daivergent
Kyle Johnson	Lighthouse Works
Regina Kline	Enable Ventures / SmartJob, LLC
Jennifer Mathis	Civil Rights Division, Department of Justice
Tiffany Meehan	Inclusively
Dr. Sachin Dev Pavithran	U.S. Access Board
Mark Riccobono	National Federation of the Blind