



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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L&I's Hiram G. Andrews Center Hosts 2024 Autism Awareness & Acceptance Walk, Resource Fair Benefitting Pennsylvania Students



Johnstown, PA – Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) Secretary Nancy A. Walker joined more than 400 autism-support students and educators from 15 Pennsylvania schools on Tuesday for the 2024 Autism Awareness & Acceptance Walk and Resource Fair, an annual event held at L&I's Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) to celebrate autism awareness and showcase the state-operated facility's offerings of postsecondary education, pre-employment transition and support services designed for people with disabilities.

Established in 1959 and operated through **L&I's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)**, HGAC specializes in providing barrier-free education and job-readiness programs to people of all backgrounds and ability levels. HGAC served more than 1,200 individuals in 2023. The HGAC campus also includes the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI), an accredited postsecondary trade and technical school specializing in education for individuals with disabilities with three associate degree programs preparing students for work in medical offices, culinary arts, and networking technology. CTI also offers seven diploma programs for careers in office administration, automotive technology, building maintenance, culinary assistant, materials management and distribution, nurse aide, and welding technology.

"Individuals with autism – just like people with disabilities of all kinds – have so much to offer in the workplace and in the community. What HGAC and CTI staff do so well is help individuals unlock the potential that's already there so that they can thrive in a career of their choosing and achieve independence," Secretary Walker said. "The educational programs offered at HGAC and CTI are open to all Pennsylvanians, but it's so important that our neighbors and colleagues with disabilities know that there's a special place in Johnstown where the facilities, staff and programs are designed specifically with them in mind – and that's why I was so glad to see so many students and educators at this year's event."

Prospective students, their teachers and families are always invited to tour the HGAC/CTI campus. Schedule a tour or inquire about applying for admission by calling 1-800-762-4211 or 814-255-8200. [Information is available on L&I's website.](#)

[Governor Josh Shapiro's proposed 2024-25 budget](#) prioritizes services for Pennsylvanians with disabilities that support independence without barriers by investing an additional \$787,000 in vocational rehabilitation. More than 50,000 individuals with disabilities receive services through the vocational rehabilitation program and an additional 17,000 students with disabilities utilize OVR's pre-employment transition services program annually. Pre-employment transition services become available to Pennsylvania students with disabilities starting at age 14.

Governor Shapiro has [identified workforce development as a top priority](#) of his Administration through an expansion of job-training, career and technical education, and apprenticeship programs that give Pennsylvanians the freedom to chart their own course. The Governor's proposed 2024-25 budget continues to invest in career and technical and vo-tech education, apprenticeship programs, and on-the-job training. Governor Shapiro is proposing to:

- Build on last year's investment in career and technical education with a \$2.4 million increase and continuation of \$7 million in support of dual enrollment;
- Increase the Commonwealth's investment in Industry Partnerships by \$2.2 million to support the workforce development and workforce needs of Pennsylvania's workers and businesses;
- Invest \$2 million to build a digital one-stop-shop for career pathways serving all Pennsylvanians, regardless of their age or educational level;
- Invest \$2 million to help businesses transition to skills-based hiring practices. Skills-based hiring practices will ensure that more Pennsylvanians who have the skills and experience but not a college degree – or the “right” degree – can find quality jobs that pay family-sustaining wages;
- Protect workers and law-abiding employers by adding 12 investigators to L&I's Bureau of Labor Law Compliance; and
- Expand and improve the Military Occupational Crosswalk resource for military families with a \$500,000 investment to develop a user-friendly web portal.

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