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Shapiro Administration Highlights \$5 Million Proposed Investment to Help People with Disabilities Find, Retain Employment at 2025 Autism Awareness & Acceptance Walk

The annual event at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) raises awareness about autism and showcases the facility's offerings of post-secondary education, pre-employment transition, and support services for people with disabilities.

Governor Shapiro's proposed 2025-26 budget includes an additional \$5 million to the Department of Labor & Industry's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to assist people with disabilities in finding employment.

Johnstown, PA – Today, the **Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I)** joined more than 550 autism-support students and educators from 16 Pennsylvania schools for the 2025 Autism Awareness & Acceptance Walk and Resource Fair held at the Department's Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC). The Shapiro Administration is committed to supporting and empowering Pennsylvanians with disabilities, which is why **Governor Josh Shapiro's [proposed 2025-26 budget](#)** calls for an additional \$5 million investment in L&I's **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)** to assist people with disabilities in finding employment through personalized services such as goal setting and counseling, vocational guidance and job placement.

"At L&I, we're not just raising awareness – we're transforming lives by breaking down barriers for Pennsylvanians with autism and other disabilities," said **Jill Moriconi, Director of the Commonwealth Technical Institute at HGAC**. "Through our work at HGAC, we're creating pathways to independence and meaningful careers where every person is supported and celebrated. Governor Shapiro's proposed investments in vocational rehabilitation reflect our commitment to building a Commonwealth where disability is not recognized as a limitation, but as a powerful source of innovation, resilience, and strength for our communities and our economy."

Established in 1959 and operated through OVR, HGAC specializes in providing barrier-free education and job-readiness programs to people of all backgrounds and ability levels, serving more than 1,300 individuals in 2024. The HGAC campus includes the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI), an accredited postsecondary trade and technical school specializing in education for individuals with disabilities. CTI offers

three associate degree programs that prepare students for work in medical offices, the culinary arts, and networking technology. CTI also offers five diploma programs for careers in automotive technology, culinary assistant, early childhood education, nurse aide, and welding technology.

Investing in workforce development and opportunities for all Pennsylvanians to chart their own course is a top priority for Governor Shapiro. Over the past two years, the Shapiro-Davis Administration has increased funding for vo-tech, career and technical education and apprenticeships by nearly \$65 million. Today, our Commonwealth invests 50 percent more in workforce development than the day Governor Shapiro took office.

The Governor's proposed 2025-26 budget looks to build upon these investments in Pennsylvania's workforce, across multiple sectors. In addition to the proposed \$5 million for OVR, some other key proposed investments are:

- **\$1 million** to the Centers for Independent Living (CIL) to recruit and hire staff
- **\$5 million** to support workforce initiatives to educate, train, and recruit nursing professionals
- **\$12.5 million** dedicated to the Workforce and Economic Development Network appropriation, leveraging \$10 million in existing funds and \$2.5 million in new state funds to train additional workers
- **\$10 million** to further boost employment in the behavioral health sector by expanding the Primary Care Loan Repayment Program at the Department of Health (DOH), broadening the program's geographic eligibility requirements and making it available to behavioral health care workers in all regions of Pennsylvania and
- **\$55 million** to support childcare workforce recruitment and retention grants; this would provide roughly \$1,000 more annually per employee to licensed childcare centers in the Child Care Works program.

Annually, 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 that become available to Pennsylvania students with disabilities starting at age 14.

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

For more information on the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, please visit the [website](#) or follow L&I on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [X](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

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