

# ECONOMIC DIGEST

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**In December...**

**Nonfarm Employment**

Connecticut.....	1,700,700
Change over month .....	+0.02%
Change over year .....	+1.3%

United States .....	143,242,000
Change over month .....	+0.2%
Change over year .....	+1.9%

**Unemployment Rate**

Connecticut.....	5.2%
United States .....	5.0%

**Consumer Price Index**

United States .....	236.525
Change over year .....	+0.7%

## Economic Status of People with Disabilities

*By Al Sylvestre, Research Analyst, DOL*

**I**n the eight years since the recession that began in 2008, conditions in Connecticut’s labor market continue to improve. As a segment of the working-age population age 16 years and older that constitutes 5% of the work force, among whom 44% are employed full time according to the US Census Bureau’s most recent (2014) American Community Survey (ACS), people with disabilities are becoming increasingly visible in the labor market. What follows is a brief examination of this population’s economic characteristics as well as some of the programs and services that provide access to opportunities for its members to attach to the labor force and retain employment in response to changes in disability status.

**The Population**

Current and potential employers of people with disabilities can gain insight to the costs and barriers—often far less onerous than many employers believe<sup>1</sup>—to hiring or retaining those employees by knowing the type of disability with which a person must live. Among the types of disabilities in the working-age population, the US Census Bureau includes six categories in its American Community Survey. The 2014 ACS shows that 5.04% of Connecticut’s labor force reports

having one or more disabilities, including 0.83% (15,040) of the employed work force with a vision difficulty, 71.5% of people with disabilities have a physical disability that includes hearing loss or an ambulatory handicap, the remaining population with one or more disabilities reports having self-care difficulties (7,928 or 0.44% of the employed work force), independent living difficulty (18,794, 1.03%), or some cognitive difficulty (35,611, 1.96%).

According to the most recent available ACS data (2007), more than one-fourth (26.2%) of Connecticut’s employed people with disabilities call Hartford County home, about one-fifth (21.7%) reside in Fairfield County, and another fifth (21.6%) live in New Haven County. About seven-tenths of the state’s people with disabilities call the state’s most urbanized areas home. The concentration of transit and social services such as vocational rehabilitation in these areas increases the likelihood that this population can get the full range of services it needs over less populous counties such as Litchfield and Tolland. Reaching out to the 6.8%, 4.2%, and 6.5% of the employed populations of disabled persons in rural places such as Litchfield, Tolland, and Windham Counties is a challenge given their scarcity of public transit. The transit-supply

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challenge in suburban Middlesex (3.8% of employed people with disabilities) and New London (9.14%) Counties is less one of supply than of distance between residences and places of employment.

Social and geographic isolation contribute to the predictable lag in education attainment among people with disabilities. As Table 1 shows below, the gap is especially pronounced in higher education as a person with a disability is one-third as likely as her non-disabled peer to have a bachelor's or advanced degree.

The percentage of the population who have attended college without receiving a bachelor's degree is about the same for people with disabilities as the population as a whole.

**Economic Characteristics**

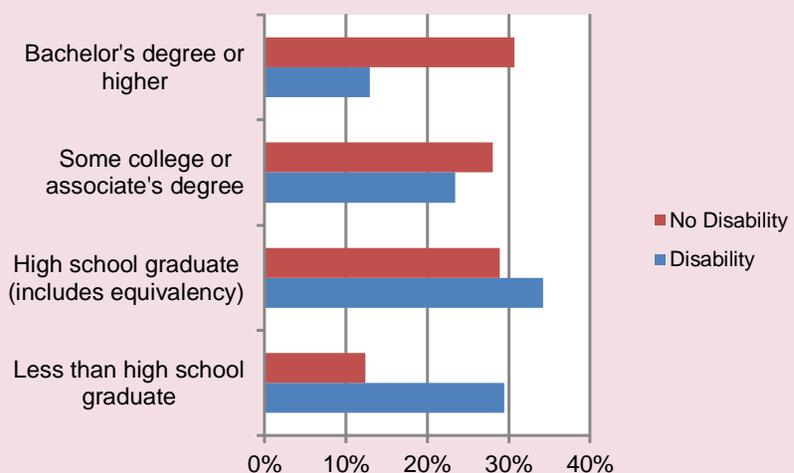
With an occupational profile that ranged from management professionals to sales; forestry to extraction; and construction to materials handling as recently as 2007,<sup>2</sup> people with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64 enjoy work force distribution roughly equivalent to that of their peers with no disabilities according to ACS. Unexpected differences in disabled persons'

representation in the labor force include a higher proportion of workers with disabilities employed in construction, extraction, repair, and maintenance as well as production, transportation, and material-moving occupations.

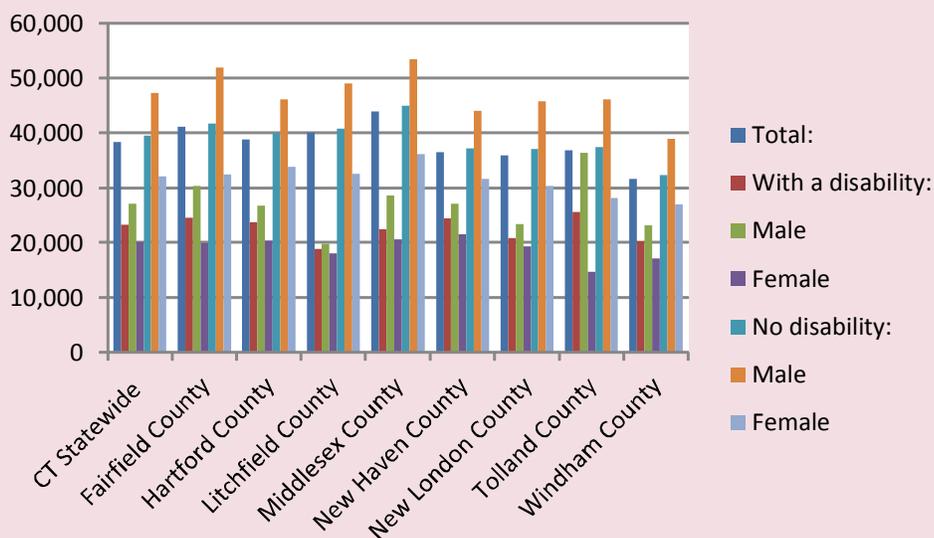
In the agricultural-forestry-fishing-hunting-mining, retail trade, transportation-warehousing-utilities, educational services-health care-social services, arts-entertainment-food service, and public administration industrial sectors, people with disabilities attached to the labor force in greater proportions than their non-disabled peers. People with disabilities are almost a third more likely than their non-disabled counterparts to make a living as self-employed workers (in their own non-incorporated businesses). Working age people with disabilities are also proportionally better represented than their non-disabled peers in public employment (federal, state, and local government).

Beyond knowing what they do and in what industry they do it, commuting methods further round out the picture of how people with disabilities sustain their attachment to the work

**Table 1. Education Attainment for US Population 25 Years and Older**



**Table 2. Statewide and County Median Incomes (in 2014 dollars)**



force. Predictably, a higher percentage of people with one or more disabilities commute in groups from carpools to taxicabs to mass transit. From a less-than-ten-percent difference in the likelihood that a person with a disability will drive to work alone compared with the person without a disability, people with disabilities are 40% more likely to work at home, nearly 60% more likely to take a cab, motorcycle, or other conveyance such as a lift-equipped van, and 20% more likely to take the bus or train compared with their non-disabled peers.

According to the US Census Bureau, as shown in Table 2 above, the Connecticut county with the highest median income—in 2014 inflation-adjusted dollars—had the third lowest median income for persons with disabilities.

The highest percentage income disparity between persons with a disability and those with no disability is in Litchfield County where the median income for a person with no disability is \$40,725 or about

2.17 times the \$18,792 median for an individual with a disability. With the notable exception of Tolland County—where men with a disability earn \$2.48 for every \$1.00 a woman with a disability earns—the income disparity between men and women with disabilities is smaller than that for their non-disabled counterparts. As Table 2 shows, the earnings disparity between women and men with disabilities ranges from 9% to 248%. It should be noted that part of the income disparity between people with and without disabilities can be attributed to a greater proportion of people with disabilities (56% in 2014) than people without (35.8% in 2014) working a part-time schedule.

### Programs and Services

Overcoming the disadvantages and barriers to employment as well as the economic disparities between working-age people with disabilities and their peers with no disabilities is more than just a matter of providing access to vocational rehabilitation services

in addition to equal access to post-secondary education, and apprenticeship opportunities. Geographic isolation, exacerbated by inequitable access to transportation, is one of the most significant barriers people with disabilities must overcome. Equal access to employment opportunities, reducing social isolation, and opening avenues to community participation become more readily available to people with disabilities when they have consistent access to transportation.

In addition to links to public transit, para-transit, and volunteer-provided private transportation provided by the public vocational rehabilitation services administered by the Department of Rehabilitation Services and its Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB), several boards and commissions whose participants include state, municipal, regional (Councils of Government), and non-profit agency officials and staff work toward filling transportation gaps that benefit persons with disabilities as well

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as people who earn low incomes. The advisory board to BESB, the Capitol Region Access to Jobs regional task force, the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission, and the Connecticut Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board address the transportation needs of constituents that range from individuals with disabilities (BESB), people on low incomes making the transition from subsistence on public benefits to self-sustaining employment (Access to Jobs), people who use non-motorized transportation—often to reach public transit—(the Bike and Ped Board), and users of public transportation (including state roadways, inter- and intra-city public transit, and passenger and freight railroad) systems.

The advisory board to the BESB—a bureau of the Department of Rehabilitation Services—meets quarterly to discuss and act on matters that pertain to the BESB’s performance in delivering education, vocational rehabilitation, and independent living services to children who are blind or visually impaired, elementary and secondary school students, transition-age (school-to-career or school-to-post-secondary-education) youth, college students, legally blind adults attached to the work force, and adults over the age of 55, and deaf-blind adults and children. Topics include transportation, technology, employment-retention services, orientation and mobility services, independent living services, and adjustment to blindness. Vocational rehabilitation staff have recently assembled a state-wide transportation guide to direct BESB clients to transit services that range from ADA-paratransit services (provided by regional transit districts) to public transit and ride-sharing

services to volunteer driver services to transport (mostly elderly) BESB clients to doctor appointments, recreation, shopping, and worship services. BESB has been providing these and other services since 1893.

Since its creation in 1997, the capitol region Access to Jobs task force has provided funding for some fixed-route transit services, ride-sharing services, rides for small groups to and from job interviews, and non-fixed route transit and shuttle services for employers who hired clients making the transition from public assistance such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) to self-sustaining employment. Overseen by state agencies such as the departments of social services and labor as well as the regional work force investment board and administered by the Capitol Region Council of Governments, the task force was meant to fill the transportation gap between fixed-route transit and employment for people living on low incomes. These services have incidentally benefited persons with disabilities, many of whom live in the same neighborhoods as their peers making the transition to employment from the public benefit rolls.

Since the early 1970’s, the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission has advised the state transportation commissioner as well as the General Assembly’s transportation committee on ways to improve the state ground transportation systems for people, goods, and services that includes passenger and freight rail as well as trucking, courier, and livery services. The commission holds monthly meetings at locations throughout the state as well as eight public hearings each year to hear, gather, and synthesize public

comment on regulatory, operational, administrative, and policy aspects of the state’s transportation systems. Recommendations that arise from these meetings and hearings are published annually in a report to the transportation commissioner and the legislative transportation committee. Recommendations that have benefited persons with disabilities include the expansion of evening fixed-route transit service in Waterbury—including service to Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC)—and greater New Britain. Additionally, the administration at NVCC is negotiating with transit providers to develop shuttle service between the city of Waterbury and the college.

Established in 2009, the state Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board concerns itself with improving non-motorized transportation that includes walking and bicycle trails and state greenways for both recreation and commuting. Established and prospective bicycle sharing services and facilities for parking and storing bicycles are also of interest to the Bike and Ped Board. Every year the Board prepares an annual report that includes recommendations for the transportation commissioner to improve the state’s bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, particularly as it relates to the so-called last mile—the last uncovered distance between transit stops and riders’ ultimate destination. Public awareness of the need for sidewalks, crosswalks, audible crossing signals, and improved maintenance of sidewalks and bus stops as well as vulnerable user legislation (to provide legal protection for pedestrian and bicyclists sharing the roadway with motor vehicles) enacted in 2014 are among the benefits the Bike and Ped Board provided to

people with disabilities.

**Conclusion**

Opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in Connecticut’s economy while improving their own standards of living continue to expand as vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs and improved employer understanding about the true costs and benefits of hiring and retaining workers with disabilities combine to improve the employment outlook for this segment of the state’s population. An examination of the disability community’s demographic and economic characteristics as well as its members’ education attainment will shed some light on the extent to which our state’s working-age population with physical disabilities is on a path to reach its full earning potential

while maximizing its contribution to the state’s economic well-being.

Knowing who they are, where they live, and the state of their economic well-being are the essential elements to understanding how people with disabilities in Connecticut can gain access to equal opportunity to work, live, and participate in the community with their non-disabled peers. The variety of services, outreach, and related activities grounded in that knowledge connect our disability population with those opportunities. ■

<sup>1</sup> This is based on discussions with vocational rehabilitation counseling staff and supervisors over the past twenty-five years.

<sup>2</sup> These are the latest data available from ACS at this level of detail. Although these data cannot be considered recent, they are illustrative that people with disabilities attach to the work force in significant numbers.

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## GENERAL ECONOMIC INDICATORS

<i>(Seasonally adjusted)</i>	3Q	3Q	CHANGE		2Q
	2015	2014	NO.	%	2015
<b>General Drift Indicator (1996=100)*</b>					
<b>Leading</b>	114.8	112.5	2.3	2.0	114.2
<b>Coincident</b>	117.3	114.2	3.1	2.7	116.3
<b>Farmington Bank Business Barometer (1992=100)**</b>	134.3	131.0	3.3	2.5	133.6
<b>Philadelphia Fed's Coincident Index (July 1992=100)***</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Dec</b>			<b>Nov</b>
<i>(Seasonally adjusted)</i>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>			<b>2015</b>
<b>Connecticut</b>	170.59	163.92	6.67	4.1	170.28
<b>United States</b>	177.02	171.54	5.48	3.2	176.55

Sources: \*Dr. Steven P. Lanza, University of Connecticut \*\*Farmington Bank \*\*\*Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia

**General Drift Indicators** are composite measures of the four-quarter change in three coincident (Connecticut Manufacturing Production Index, nonfarm employment, and real personal income) and three leading (housing permits, manufacturing average weekly hours, and initial unemployment claims) economic variables, and are indexed so 1996 = 100.

The **Farmington Bank Business Barometer** is a measure of overall economic growth in the state of Connecticut that is derived from non-manufacturing employment, real disposable personal income, and manufacturing production.

The **Philadelphia Fed’s Coincident Index** summarizes current economic condition by using four coincident variables: nonfarm payroll employment, average hours worked in manufacturing, the unemployment rate, and wage and salary disbursements deflated by the consumer price index (U.S. city average).