August 11, 2011

Senator Tom Harkin
Chairman
HELP Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Mike Enzi
Ranking Member
HELP Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Employment
and Workplace Safety
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Johnny Isakson
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Employment
and Workplace Safety
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Harkin, Enzi, Murray and Isakson:

The undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Employment
and Training Task Force want to take this opportunity to thank you for your concerted,
bipartisan efforts to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act [WIA]. We know that
considerable work has gone into your draft plan over many months and that your aim is
to produce a bill that will advance economic independence and opportunity for millions
of Americans, including people with disabilities.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that, in June 2011, the participation of people
with disabilities in the labor force was 21.3 percent. By comparison, the participation of
people with no disability in the labor force was 70.2 percent. The official unemployment
rate for people with disabilities, meaning those who have lost their jobs and who are
actively seeking employment, was 18.4 percent, compared with 9.4 percent for people
with no disability.

If these numbers are to change, we have long held that the presumption in public policy
should be a preference for integrated, competitive employment and that self-directed,
person-centered planning should drive systems for people with disabilities. We
acknowledge that many provisions in the published draft reflect recommendations made
by this task force over the course of several Congresses. We appreciate the attention
of the committee to the longstanding concerns of our community. We also welcome the
opportunity to work with you and your staff to address unresolved questions about the
draft, prior to mark up.
Thus, we ask that you continue with the reauthorization process. Failure to modernize this nation's workforce system will do nothing to improve the abysmal employment statistics for people with disabilities. Many in Washington claim that their number one concern is jobs. For too long, people with disabilities have listened to words when they really need action.

We thank you for your bipartisan leadership to produce positive action for Americans with disabilities. We look forward to seeing a revised draft and working with you to move WIA reauthorization during this Congress.

ACCSES
APSE
American Counseling Association
American Rehabilitation Counseling Association
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation
Easter Seals
Epilepsy Foundation
International Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation
Jewish Federations of North America
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities
National Council on Independent Living
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Rehabilitation Association
NISH
Paralyzed Veterans of America
The Arc
United Spinal Association