



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

November 17, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid,
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221 Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Leader:

When Congress reconvenes, you will consider an economic stimulus package to address the continuing weaknesses of the economy and instability of the job market. The undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Employment and Training Task Force urge you to include in that legislation critically needed funding for Title I programs under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended, and to specifically target people with disabilities in any programmatic efforts undertaken to decrease the rising unemployment rate of Americans. CCD is a working coalition of national consumer, advocacy, provider, and professional organizations working together with and on behalf of the 54 million children and adults with disabilities and their families living in the United States. The CCD Employment and Training Task Force focuses on policy issues affecting the full participation of people with disabilities in the nation's workforce.

When Congress passed H.R. 2638, the Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act for FY 2009, it held funding for most domestic discretionary programs to the FY 2008 levels through March 6, 2009. A consequence of that decision is that the mandatory cost-of-living increase (COLA) for Title I vocational rehabilitation programs that serve over one million people with significant disabilities has not been allocated. Already, 43 state agencies have had to establish and/or implement an Order of Selection (OOS) due to a lack of funds. OOS is a system of prioritization that requires individuals with the most significant disabilities to be served first whenever a state agency is not able to serve everyone who has applied for VR services. Without the COLA, additional states will enter an OOS with long waiting lists,

denying even more people with disabilities access to employment services, and increasing dependence on other state and federal resources such as SSI and SSDI, TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid, to name a few.

Current data indicates that the workforce participation rate of people with disabilities is less than half that of the working age population without disabilities. For too long, policymakers have ignored what would be considered a crisis under any other circumstances. We ask you to increase funding for those programs designed to advance employment of people with disabilities, simplify and publicize tax incentives that promote hiring of workers with disabilities, and strengthen the federal government's existing authority to serve as a model employer of people with disabilities.

On behalf of:

ACCSES

American Foundation for the Blind

American Network of Community Options and Resources

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

Easter Seals

International Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation

Helen Keller National Center

Learning Disabilities Association of America

National Coalition on Deaf-Blindness

National Disability Rights Network

National Down Syndrome Congress

National Rehabilitation Association

Paralyzed Veterans of America

United Spinal Association

Also sent to: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Minority Leader John Boehner, Senator Tom Harkin [Chairman, Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee], Senator Arlen Specter [Ranking Member, Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee], Congressman David Obey [Chairman, House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee], Congressman James Walsh [Ranking Member, House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee]