



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

April 6, 2009

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman,

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the **official unemployment rate for people with disabilities, meaning those who have lost their jobs and those who are actively seeking employment, in February 2009 was 14% (8.7% for those with no disability)**. While this statistic is alarming, even more troubling is the lack of labor force participation by people with disabilities. BLS reported that for the same month **only 23% of all adults with disabilities participated in the labor force as compared with 71% of the non-disabled population**. Further, those individuals with disabilities who can find jobs are more likely to have less job experience and are more likely to earn lower incomes than individuals without disabilities.

Congress is currently considering an important opportunity to continue its historic commitment to advancing the full participation of people with disabilities in the American workforce when it considers the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) this year. On behalf of the undersigned member organizations of the CCD Employment and Training Task Force, we offer the following policy principles to guide to this reauthorization process.

Workforce Investment Act Reauthorization Principles

- People with disabilities using the workforce investment system must be thought of as job seekers first. The workforce investment system should then respond to their needs from this assumption as it would any job seeker utilizing the system.
- The workforce investment system should be reconstructed using the principles of universal design to ensure that any job seeker can access the full array of services available.
 - Training should be enhanced for workforce investment system staff to respond to differing levels of customer need.
 - The workforce investment system should be structured to access and utilize a variety of approaches and strategies to infuse disability awareness throughout local service delivery systems.
 - This reauthorization should strengthen the workforce investment systems commitment to physical, technological and programmatic accessibility.

- People with disabilities must be included in any categories of priority of service and funds should be dedicated to meeting those needs. Workforce investment funds should prioritize targeted at-risk groups.
- The workforce investment system should approach each job seeker as an individual and respond to their needs accordingly.
 - It should provide each job seeker with access to training needed to meet local labor market needs.
 - It should utilize strategies such as customized employment, job restructuring, and flex arrangements that allow job seekers access to maximize opportunities in the local labor market.
 - It should provide reasonable accommodations when appropriate.
- A dedicated federal funding stream should be established to adequately fund all of the infrastructure costs of our nation's job training system.
- The workforce investment system must be held accountable for its services to people with disabilities. This means that:
 - The performance measurement system should be redesigned so as to not create disincentives to serving people with disabilities.
 - Reporting requirements must be changed to include data on services to people with disabilities.
 - State and local system governance plans should explicitly outline strategies for serving individuals with disabilities.
 - Governance bodies should assure that staff are appropriately trained to respond to the needs of job seekers with disabilities.
- The employment interests of people with disabilities must be represented in the workforce investment system's governance structure.

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) is a coalition of over 100 national disability organizations and advocates for national public policy that ensures the inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. The Employment and Training Task Force is a smaller group within the coalition that addresses Federal disability employment issues, working to secure national public policy that advances self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion in employment for individuals with disabilities.

We hope this document will be useful as you move through the legislative process and look forward to working with you over the coming months.

Sincerely,

ACCSES

American Council for the Blind

American Foundation for the Blind

American Network of Community Options and Resources

APSE: The Network on Employment

Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

Easter Seals, Inc.

Goodwill Industries International
Helen Keller National Center
Inter-National Association of Business, Industry & Rehabilitation
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Coalition on Deaf-Blindness
National Council on Independent Living
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Industries for the Blind
National Rehabilitation Association
National Spinal Cord Injury Association
NISH
Paralyzed Veterans of America
The Arc of the United States
The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
United Cerebral Palsy

CC: The Honorable Michael B. Enzi, Ranking Member, Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair, Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety
The Honorable Johnny Isakson, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety