



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

June 14th, 2017,

U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Guthrie and Ranking Member Davis,

We are pleased to send you this letter before your subcommittee's hearing on "Helping Americans Get Back to Work: Implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)." On behalf of the members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Employment and Training Task Force, we are delighted to share with you our perspective on what the Innovation and Opportunity Act has meant for our community. We want to talk about how implementation is proceeding, how states are opening more jobs for people with disabilities and what gains people have made because of the workforce system.

CCD is a coalition of approximately 100 national disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. Specifically, our Task Force works on employment policy at the federal level, while our individual organizations often work at the state level. This gives us a unique perspective.

A more efficient workforce system and more effective job training programs are clearly in the best interest of American workers, especially those with serious barriers such as people with disabilities. WIOA was in no way a perfect law. However it is a serious and sustained investment in opportunities for people with disabilities to earn an income and become independent, just like anyone else. In this letter, we briefly document the following:

- **Youth with disabilities are getting the skills, training and experience they need.**
- **How new WIOA requirements are enabling success for people with disabilities.**
- **How WIOA is empowering more people with disabilities to earn an income.**

We welcome the Subcommittee's attention to the successes of WIOA and the continuing workforce needs of the disability community. It is critical that Congress understand the return on investment that continuing WIOA funding represents. Given current budget proposals that would cut critical workforce programs, we want to reiterate that people with disabilities need real dollars to create real opportunities. Above all, employers need talented workers to succeed.

Sincerely,

**Institute for Educational Leadership
Jewish Federation of North America
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Disability Institute
National Disability Rights Network
Paralyzed Veterans of America
RespectAbility
TASH
United Cerebral Palsy**

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Aaron Kaufman at the Jewish Federation of North America (Aaron.Kaufman@jewishfederations.org, 202-785-493), Alicia Epstein at SourceAmerica (aepstein@sourceamerica.org, 703-584-3987) or Philip Pauli at RespectAbility (philipp@respectabilityusa.org, 240-483-4134).

Youth with disabilities are getting the skills, training and experience needed to succeed.

One of the critical priorities behind the bipartisan support for the passage of WIOA was the fact that the new law was deeply committed to preparing youth for the 21st century economy. By making investments in opportunities to improve skills, provide training and offer experience, WIOA has prepared thousands of youth to succeed. This is especially important for students with serious barriers to employment, such as disability. That is why we want to draw your subcommittee's attention to the successes that youth with disabilities have had under WIOA as documented by the [PY2015 WIASRD Data](#).

- **Fully 15.6% of WIOA youth program participants were youth with disabilities.**
- **That means over 13,000 youth with disabilities had unprecedented access to skills training and job placement supports, enabling them to succeed.**
- **In 2015, fully 65% of WIOA youth with disabilities got a job, 70% earned a degree and more than half improved their literacy skills.**

These are transformative results for a population that all too often ends up never entering the workforce, never earning a degree and never having a fair chance to succeed. Preparing youth with disabilities to succeed is a critically important issue and that deserve special attention from your subcommittee. In this era with pressures to save taxpayer and realign resources, it is important to keep in mind that for each young person who goes to workforce instead of going on benefits, the American taxpayer can potentially save [up to \\$340,000 dollars per beneficiary](#).

How new WIOA program elements are enabling success for people with disabilities.

The new Innovation and Opportunity law very much represented a paradigm shift in how the nation's workforce system served its client and met the talent needs of employers. A key part of this change has been around new program elements aimed at improving the system. Thus, it is worth talking about why and how some of the new program elements of Title 1 WIOA Youth Programs are so important for people with disabilities.

- **First is the importance of financial literacy instruction.** This is essential because financial literacy, banking and security are key problems that impact our community. As documented by the National Disability Institute, "More than one-quarter (26 percent) of working-age adults with disabilities live in poverty compared with 11 percent of those without a disability." Further, as reported in [Banking Status and Financial Behaviors of Adults with Disabilities](#), over 24.5 million households (20 percent of all households) were underbanked. Households with a disability are more likely to be unbanked or underbanked and face barriers to equal participation in the financial system. Embedding financial literacy materials inside of WIOA lays groundwork to address these issues.
- **Second are entrepreneurial skills training.** As reported last year in *Work Matters: A Framework for States on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities* from the Council of State Governments (CSG), "for some individuals with disabilities, self-employment and entrepreneurship opportunities represent alternative employment and economic self-sufficiency strategies." In fact, according to BLS data, fully one in ten people with disabilities who are employed and contributing to the workforce are actually self-employed. In fact, Alaska, Florida and New York have participated in DOL sponsored projects that are exploring opportunities for state agencies to support this work.
- **Third is the provision of local labor market and employment information.** Accurate and actionable information about local economic conditions, employment opportunities and priority populations has helped to transform the workforce system in the past few years. The Unified and Combined State Plans written by state leaders was a key point of action where more data was shared across the system. As [documented in testimony](#) to the [Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities \(ACICIEID\)](#), many state plans as written possessed "inconsistent data points on the disability community" and many plans lacked "distinctions between youth with disabilities, working-age people with disabilities, and people who age into disability."
- **Lastly are "activities that help youth transition to postsecondary education."** Education has long been the best path for any American, regardless of disability, ethnicity, race or creed, to succeed. Unequal educational attainment has been a factor in why people with disabilities lag behind in terms of labor force participation. New data show that out of the 56 million people with disabilities, only 13% of adults with disabilities have a bachelor's degree while other data shows that only 3% of adults with disabilities have advanced degrees. These gaps reflect the limited pathways open to people with disabilities and show why early preparation through WIOA is so important.

How WIOA is empowering more people with disabilities to earn an income.

Looking broadly at the success of WIOA, it is important to acknowledge where we are now, what we do know and what we will know. As our workforce system rapidly closes in on the end of Program Year 2016, data will soon be made publically available which will show how WIOA's first full year has played out. The currently available outcome data and performance metrics reflects a system in the process of change. The WIASRD Records for the first year of WIOA show a system coming to grips with a host of new requirements, new program structures and new demands on limited resources. Until the PY2016 Data is fully available, we cannot complete a comprehensive assessment of what the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act has accomplished. There are strong signs that this law is working and that more people with disabilities are employed as a result.

To illustrate this, we present to you the following information from [WIOA Trends Over Time](#), the [PY 2015 WIASRD Data Book](#) as well as the Chairman and [Ranking Member's](#) home states. We would offer the perspective that these data points represent a basic analysis of WIOA data and can be used as a baseline for assessing PY16 performance. These points are:

- Between April 2015 and March 2016, WIOA funded programs served a total of 66,323 job seekers with disabilities including 44,230 adults with disabilities, 10,321 Younger Youth with disabilities and 3,434 Older Youth with disabilities.
- Between PY2011 under the old WIA system and new PY2016 WIOA system, one and half times more job seekers with disabilities participation in DOL program.
- Job seekers with disabilities accounted for 5.6% of all WIOA program participants, 4.2% of dislocated worker participants and 15.6% of youth participants.
- Looking solely at adult with disabilities who exited WIOA programs between October 2014 and September 2015, we find that 45.6% secured employment. Further, three quarters of adults with disabilities who secured a job through WIOA programs were still employed six months later.
- Dislocated worker programs were even more successful serving their clients with disabilities. In PY2015, over 54% of dislocated workers with disabilities successfully reentered the workforce and over 80% were retained six months later.
- In Kentucky, between April 2015 and March 2016, WIOA programs served 1,926 individuals with disabilities. In that same period of time, Kentuckians with disabilities accounted for only 3.6% of program participants.
- In Kentucky, 44.3% of adult WIOA program participants with disabilities found jobs and 83.3% stayed in those jobs. Among the 38 youth with disabilities who participated in WIOA programs, 46.9% found jobs and 9.4% pursued further education. Among the 125

Kentuckians with disabilities who participated in dislocated worker programs, 51.8% found employment and fully 83.3% remained in those jobs.

- In California between April 2015 and March 2016, WIOA programs served 4,997 job seekers with disabilities, including 2,848 adults with disabilities, 849 dislocated workers with disabilities, 905 Younger Youth with disabilities and 493 Older Youth with disabilities.
- In California, 49.6% of adult WIOA program participants with disabilities found jobs and 79.4% stayed in those jobs. Among the 906 Californians with disabilities who participated in dislocated worker programs, 60.9% found employment and fully 83.1% remained in those jobs. Among the youth with disabilities served by California's WIOA programs, 46.0% found jobs and 12.5% pursued further education.

In other news related to [Kentucky](#), Gov. Bevin has just launched a new Task Force “to address barriers to employment and promote workforce inclusion among people with disabilities, foster children, disabled veterans, and individuals burdened by substance abuse or criminal records.” This new initiative builds directly off of the pioneering work that the Department of Labor has done around jobs and people with disabilities. Deputy Assistant Secretary Jennifer Sheehy of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) observed that “We need to look at what federal policies do work, but also what is happening in states that works—and then support that.” This opportunity will provide a new example of how states improve workforce outcomes.

As noted before, the above numbers are offered with the condition that this is PY2015 data and does not reflect the full scope of changes caused by WIOA. Given everything our member organizations have worked observed, we are confident that even better outcomes lie ahead. Time constrains our Task Force's ability to offer a deeper analysis of the available data. However, we are confident that the promise of WIOA is being fulfilling each day as more and more people with disabilities pursue the skills, training and experience they need to succeed.