



Commemorating 40 Years
Of Disability Advocacy
1973-2013

March 5, 2013

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline:

On behalf of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Employment and Training Task Force, we are writing to express our deep concerns over several components of H.R. 803, Supporting Knowledge and Investing in Lifelong Skills (SKILLS) Act. CCD is a coalition of over 100 national disability rights, advocacy and provider organizations that advocates on behalf of the 57 million people with disabilities and their families. The Employment and Training Task Force follows issues affecting employment opportunities for working age individuals with disabilities.

As currently written, this legislation does not adequately address the chronically low labor force participation rate of people with disabilities and could be detrimental to efforts to promote economic independence for this population of Americans. The consolidation of federal training programs for disadvantaged populations including people with disabilities and veterans with disabilities is particularly troublesome as the generic state workforce system has historically failed to serve people with disabilities.

Moreover, we strongly object to the repeal of Title VI of the Rehabilitation Act which authorizes the Supported Employment program for individuals with the most significant disabilities. These individuals often face the greatest challenges in obtaining and retaining employment. Supported employment provides many people with the most significant disabilities the appropriate, ongoing support that is necessary for success in competitive integrated employment. Supported employment provides opportunities for individuals who would have not otherwise received employment services.

Title VI also includes authorization of the Projects with Industry program which actively involves business in rehabilitation programs by providing training and placement services for good competitive jobs in the community. By rolling supported employment into another part of the Act that requires state matching funds, the committee will severely limit these services to persons in need because significant numbers of states are already unable to provide the state match to capture all federal funding available to them. The repeal of title VI will have the unintended consequence of greatly exacerbating the already unacceptable 75% jobless rate for individuals with significant disabilities.

The task force is also concerned about employment opportunities for wounded veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Although H.R. 803 attempts to address employment issues affecting veterans with disabilities by requiring state workforce plans to outline how they will serve veterans and veterans with disabilities, creating a new "veterans employment specialist" position that is to be integrated into the One Stop career system and requiring local workforce boards to have a veterans employment specialist representative, it nonetheless eliminates the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program which was specifically created to assist veterans with the greatest employment barriers. In addition, there appear to be few if any accountability

measures included in the legislation to ensure that veterans with the most significant disabilities will in fact be helped by this new system.

The task force is also very disappointed that the SKILLS Act proposes to eliminate the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). This Department of Labor program helps low-income, unemployed older Americans (age 55 and older) return to the workplace by matching them up with internship-like training experiences in their communities. These temporary training opportunities are critical in helping unemployed older adults transition into permanent employment. Our task force supports this program because many people with disabilities are served through SCSEP. In a recent study, the Government Accountability Office found that older workers, including those with disabilities, face longer periods of unemployment than younger workers and face unique reemployment challenges, including “employer reluctance to hire older workers” and “out-of-date skills.” One of the GAO recommendations was to increase funding for SCSEP to keep up with the aging population (only a small percentage of eligible individuals are currently served by SCSEP) and to “meet the employment needs of a very disadvantaged and underserved population that many employers are unlikely to employ in the absence of severe labor shortages.” (GAO-12-445) The data demonstrates both the need and effectiveness of SCSEP, which is why we do not support the provision in the SKILLS Act that eliminates this program.

The continuation and improvement of key programs that assist people with disabilities in finding and maintaining employment is critical in our current environment. In particular, services to students with disabilities in need of vital pre-employment transition programs must be strengthened. H.R. 798, an alternative WIA bill has several components that would serve to strengthen H.R. 803. We urge the members of the committee to integrate the best parts of each bill such that the needs of Americans with disabilities, from student to senior and veteran to civilian, are met.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have questions or would like to discuss further, please contact Alicia Epstein at aepstein@nish.org or 571-921-9362.

Sincerely,

ACCSES

American Counseling Association

American Foundation for the Blind

American Rehabilitation Counseling Association

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Council State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

Easter Seals

Goodwill Industries International, Inc.

Institute for Educational Leadership

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities

National Association of State Directors of Special Education

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators

National Council on Independent Living

National Down Syndrome Congress

NISH

Paralyzed Veterans of America

The Arc of the United States

United Spinal Association