



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES

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