



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

January 26, 2021

Cathy Russell
Director, Office of Presidential Personnel
Gautam Raghavan
Deputy Director, Office of Presidential Personnel

Dear Ms. Russell and Mr. Raghavan:

The co-chairs of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Rights Task Force urge the Biden Administration to appoint the following four individuals to the seats for public members of the AbilityOne Commission: Chai Feldblum, Karla Gilbride, Bryan Bashin, and Christina Brandt. CCD is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society.

The AbilityOne Program, created by the Javitz Wagner O’Day Act, authorizes the federal government to purchase products and services from organizations that employ individuals with significant disabilities. As the program serves more than 46,000 people with disabilities and accounts for \$4 billion in federal contracts, how it operates is of great importance to the disability community. In particular, the composition of the committee that operates the program—the Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, known as the AbilityOne Commission—is of concern because that committee will have to grapple with the issues about the program’s structure raised by the 2016 [report](#) of the Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for People with Disabilities.

We recommend four individuals to fill the four seats on the AbilityOne Commission designated for private citizens. We urge you to appoint: (1) **Chai Feldblum** for the seat designated for an individual conversant with the employment issues faced by individuals with significant disabilities, (2) **Karla Gilbride** for the seat designated for an individual conversant with the employment issues faced by blind individuals, (3) **Bryan Bashin** for the seat designated for a person representing blind individuals employed in qualified nonprofit agencies for the blind, and (4) **Christina Brandt** for the seat designated for an individual representing individuals with other significant disabilities employed by a qualified nonprofit agency.

Each of these individuals would bring deep expertise and enthusiasm for advancing employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. Each has the background and commitment to help the Commission address the critical issues facing the AbilityOne program and ensure that the program acts in the interests of people with disabilities.

We urge you to act quickly to name these four public members to the Commission. This is the moment in time for creative action to advance competitive, integrated employment for people with significant disabilities. Together with the inclusion in President Biden's stimulus proposal of a provision to eliminate the subminimum wage, appointing these well-respected members of the disability community to the AbilityOne Commission will send an important message of President Biden's support for advancing the civil and economic rights of people with disabilities.

Summaries of the background of each the four proposed public members are below, and their resumes are attached.

Chai Feldblum: Chai Feldblum is a national expert in disability law and employment. She led the drafting and negotiating of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. As a law professor at Georgetown Law School, she and her students represented non-profit organizations, including disability rights organizations, in advocating for legislation and administrative regulations to support social justice goals. Chai served as a Commissioner of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission during the Obama Administration where she spearheaded the issuance of regulations to increase employment of people with disabilities in the federal government. Chai is a person with the non-manifest disability of anxiety disorder.

Karla Gilbride: Karla Gilbride is a lifelong advocate for disability justice, equity and inclusion, as well as an engaged member of the blind community. She worked for three years as a lawyer at Disability Rights Advocates, where she represented blind individuals seeking accommodations on professional licensing exams and contending with other barriers to employment. Karla's work on behalf of people with disabilities seeking employment on fair and equal terms continued at the law firm of Mehri & Skalet and now as a senior attorney at Public Justice. She has also gained insight into the problems facing workers with disabilities through her role as the Vice President for Public Policy of the National Employment Lawyers Association. An avid goalball player, skier and tandem cyclist, Karla has also deepened her ties to the blind community through her ongoing involvement with the Metro Washington Association of Blind Athletes, an organization she co-founded in 2015. Karla is a person with the manifest disability of blindness.

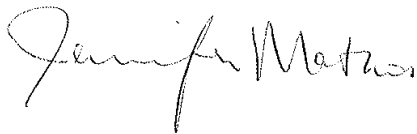
Bryan Bashin: Bryan Bashin is CEO of the Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco, a 119-year-old nonprofit devoted to the comprehensive training and employment of blind people. For 30 years his organization has employed blind workers through the National Industries for the Blind (one of the central non-profits in the AbilityOne program), and over the last 11 years Bryan has overseen significant expansions of direct blind employment in the AbilityOne space, but most importantly in competitive, integrated workplaces. Bryan previously worked as an Assistant Regional Commissioner for the Department of Education Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA) where he supervised \$400 million in federal disability spending in Arizona, Nevada, California, Hawaii and Pacific territories. From 1998 until 2004 Bryan was

Executive Director of the Sacramento Society for the Blind, where he led a strong expansion of blindness services, including competitive employment programs. He has also been an expert witness in cases involving employment of people with disabilities. A former science journalist, Bryan is well acquainted with industrial and technical processes and skill needs of employers. Bryan is currently a Board member of VisionServe Alliance, a membership association of more than 100 US blindness agencies. Bryan is a person with the manifest disability of blindness.

Christina Brandt: Christina Brandt is the CEO of an innovative nonprofit, an AbilityOne producer with over 4 decades of quality service to the government customer. She transformed AtWork! from a sheltered workshop paying subminimum wages to a nationally recognized best-practice provider of customized and integrated community employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As a subject matter expert, Christina has delivered training and technical assistance in multiple states, including significant work in Oregon implementing the settlement of *Lane vs. Brown*. Throughout her 46-year career she has advanced equity and inclusion for people with disabilities and was instrumental in securing Washington State’s Employment First legislation. Christina is a person with the manifest disability of osteoarthritis/degenerative disc disease, for which she uses a mobility scooter.

Together, these four individuals bring a wealth of personal and professional experience to advancing the employment of people with disabilities. Having these individuals appointed by President Biden as public members of the AbilityOne Commission will infuse essential energy and expertise into the work of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Mathis
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law



Kelly Buckland
National Council on Independent Living



Stephen Lieberman
United Spinal Association



Samantha Crane
Autistic Self Advocacy Network

/s/
Allison Nichol
Epilepsy Foundation

/s/
Molly Burgdorf
The Arc of the United States

Co-chairs, CCD Rights Task Force