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CCD NDEAM Panel  
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>> ALICIA EPSTEIN: I'm going to chime in as people on this webinar are waiting. We are smoothing out some technical glitches and we will get started momentarily.

Thank you for joining, we will get started very shortly with the panel and the panelists. Thank you.

Okay, it seems we got everything solved. I want to welcome everyone, my name is Alicia Epstein the government affairs policy manager with SourceAmerica. I am one of the cochairs for the CCD employment and training task force. We are thrilled to have you will join us this afternoon as part of this month's National Disability Employment Awareness Month. We are really excited, we have wonderful panels, two of them.

We are going to talk about the employment arena for people with disabilities and transitioning from [can't understand] to competitive integrative employment.

That is going to be the first panel discussion, and then we will have a five minute break and we are going to switch over to the second panel to discuss more broad strategies and innovation, best practices and recruiting and hiring people with disabilities within and during -- during and after the pandemic.

With that I'm excited to introduce the first panel. We have Chris Brandt, she is the CEO for AtWork! which is a nonprofit organization in the state of Washington. She was also just

appointed as one of the new commissioners on the US AbilityOne commission.

We also have Courtney Williams. She is the director for -- I'm sorry, Community Employment Alliance. Sorry, that was the interpreter.

And we also have Ivanova, and she works AtWork! in Washington and she will talk about the self advocacy perspective.

With that I just want to give a quick overview about the issues.

In this past year we have started seeing more and more efforts nationwide to phase out 14C of the [can't understand] act and it's a special certificate for paying people with disabilities based on their productivity level.

For many of those individuals, they could earn below the federal minimum wage. So far there is about 10 states including Washington that have passed laws forbidding the use of the 14C certificate to get wages through that program.

Also currently there are two pieces of legislation that have been introduced by Congress to end the use of 14C. One is raise the wage act, that is HR 2373, the transition to competitive integrated employment.

Based on the recent data from the Department of Labor wage and hour division the number of entities that have been applying for 14C certificates has drastically gone down. From 120,000 to maybe about 60,000-ish, depending on the status of their certificate.

The point is those numbers are going down significantly and with that I am thrilled to welcome our panelists to be able to talk more specifically about strategies Anna Lawson have been passed in Washington state to phase out 14C by 2023 that was passed this past summer.

With that I want to pass it over first to Courtney.

>> COURTNEY WILLIAMS: Hi everybody. I think Eric is going to bring up our PowerPoint.

You can go to the next slide. This is just an agenda of what you guys can expect from the panel of Chris, of ANOVA, and

myself. We are going to talk past and present, the journey of that work which Chris Brandt is the CEO.

We will hear about Washington's approach the lens of a self advocate, self advocates really trailblazing Washington State and I think that is what make this a unique. And we will share little bit about the role of the community alliance and together we have a recipe for success that we would love to share with everyone.

>> CHRISTINE BRANDT: Okay, thank you everyone. I am to be talking with you today about AtWork! modernization community integrated employment and ending the use of 14C certificates.

Go to the next slide please.

I love talking about this. This is a picture of me with my cousin Carol. I grew up with Carol, we played in the woods out here, chased frogs and salamanders and had a lot of fun and Carol went to school and I didn't and I am that old.

In spite of the fact that she didn't get to go to school and experienced discrimination, she was one of the first people in Washington state to get a supported employment job. She is intellectual and of element of disabilities. She worked at the hardware store in our small hometown until she retired just a few years ago.

I am still working on having enough to retire but she was fully vested and had a full and wonderful life.

[Audio cutting in and out] looks like I am losing my bandwidth a little, sorry about that.

I've been doing this for 48 years, a long time. And it's really exciting to be the CEO of AtWork!, a very innovative nonprofit it was on the cutting edge of competitive integrated employment and to have been appointed to the AbilityOne commission what I am hoping to make with my fellow private citizens in government appointees and significant changes that will improve employment for people with disabilities across the federal government sector. Our federal government should be a model employer of people with disabilities in all aspects of their --

[Audio cutting in and out]

-- Intellectual and of element of disabilities. Often we serve people that others have deemed unemployable or not likely to be successful in employment.

We are celebrating our 60th anniversary next year. We have \$7 million in revenue which is really small compared to a lot of the big organizations across the country. 85 staff and we serve 450 people a year, 500 right before Covid and we are building back up to that.

This is showing this revenue chart because one of the things that providers of sheltered workshops are concerned about is their business model, and they have been providing services to people for decades, many of them just like AtWork! and how are they going to modify, modernize their business model in order to pay people prevailing wages.

And when I say prevailing I am not saying sub minimum. People with disabilities should earn the same money as those without disabilities with whom they work side-by-side.

You can see from the revenue pie after the money is coming from what we call mission services and those are vocational rehabilitation, from developmental disabilities administration, even some cities that are contributing to the services we deliver in competitive integrated employment.

The other half of the pie, a small amount is fundraising, and the rest is our Enterprises. A little bit of AbilityOne, 17 percent, ace is a [can't understand] wholly-owned subsidiary that incidentally employs three people who have identify themselves as people with disabilities, but its purpose is to generate income to help us deliver our mission.

This is a picture of me there in the background, and in the middle is Jim Larson. And in the foreground is Brian Collins from Microsoft. I had to write down his current title because it just changed. He is the director of global workplace services.

So he is responsible for all of their real estate and overseeing accessibility, and he also oversees their very robust and world replicated supported employment program.

This is us testifying at a hearing to end subminimum wage and Washington State, and we made some progress and you will hear

more about that from Courtney and Ivanova. We got a chunk of it done and it's really serious and it's important to all of us.

Jim Larson in the middle, that is the pioneer. He retired recently,, he was the CEO of an organization called Morningside in about nine counties in Washington and he was the first to close a large sheltered workshop in 2004. So he was first to go.

And shortly after that in 2006, you will hear about that in just a minute, AtWork! embarked on the same story. So we were there with that perspective sharing testimony and it really helped to have Brian from Microsoft there as one of our champions.

So I work at work wise, as the chief operations officer, and then I came back when the previous CEO retired and it became clear that we would have an opportunity to [can't understand]

I knew it from my cousin, I knew it from people with disabilities that this really was the right thing to do and what we needed to do for equity and justice for people.

So in 2006 we declare that we would leave no one behind and we would stop serving people in segregated and isolating environments like sheltered workshops with facility based pay services then we would stop using 14C certificates.

We have three sheltered workshops in three communities, 180 people, 50 or so in group supported employment, landscaping, janitorial, recycling cruise, and [can't understand] supported employment.

We took a while, we took our time and work very hard and we worked very hard with our mentor Jim Larson and another mentor Chris Christian who closed their workshop a few years before we did and we supported and mentored each other through that process which is very, very key and you will see that in the federal legislation that is being proposed, that that technical assistance and training and transformation time period is included in it.

And it was key to do that here in Washington state as well. So in 2014 we closed our last sheltered workshop and on the 25th anniversary the of the Americans With Disabilities Act we started paying everyone prevailing wages.

We are very proud of that and we have done that successfully, and people will say people will lose their jobs, especially people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Here are folks in the top right picture, Ken and John and you can see [can't understand]'s arm ended Tim has since passed away. MAR packaging spices and one of our sheltered workshop that had a contract to do that type of work.

There are the three of them in the community jobs. Every single one got a job and Mel is holding up her team member for the month with a job because of the local Walgreens, you see John in the middle, she is not working at AtWork! but he has an AtWork! patient on and is lei which is part of his Hawaiian style and he wanted to party close to his heritage and they celebrated him getting his committee job so for logged on the words AtWork! shirt at his new job at Buffalo industries where he is packaging and labeling rags for places like automotive shops and such.

And then Ken who is at copy tag where he is an office assistant. And he is very, very meticulous and very quick, and he likes not to run out of work. His biggest accommodation is a bill that he can bring three times, likes doing things and freeze, he rings the bell three times when he runs out of work so his boss can bring in more. He has got several raises and promotions because of how reliable and protective fee is on his job.

It's all about the people we serve and their families because we know families can be afraid of people with disabilities can be afraid of people who have worked decades in sheltered workshops can be really afraid because they haven't gotten the opportunity for real choice in extremes that we get. We alt right all cons of jobs. I worked in a laundromat, was a mangler, I had to put wet sheets on the machine and it scared me. I knew I did not want a career in this laundry facility.

And people with disabilities particularly intellectual and developmental aren't often given those opportunities.

So we needed to make sure we did that and we really begin to focus on outward movement to community integrated employment and internal upward mobility. We promote a lot from within. Most of our managers are people who have been promoted.

We had what we call the really big important meeting where we invited three different providers of person centered planning and the people we serve and their parents to come and choose a

provider that can really focus on their plan and robust discovery, 40, 60, 90 hours in the community experience things for real.

Like Mike with a big grin on his face he [can't understand] at Rite Aid where he was seeing other opportunities and he was one of the last to leave the workshop. He was really one of our productive people and ran the forklift and of course his boss did not want to see him leave because you know when you are running those concert programs you have a tendency to want to keep your best people and those of the people that you should place first.

So this is Mike at his new job at Microsoft and he will tell you how much he loves Microsoft. And proclaim it loudly.

Assistive technology was also really important. In the picture below Mike you see Bob. Bob, nobody thought Bob could work because of his physical disabilities. He has cerebral palsy and his head is what he controls best [can't understand] most accuracy so he has a head switch and he does his old job with his head.

He is a quality control center -- when you call up and they say this call is being recorded for quality control purposes, Bob is the quality control purpose. And his boss says he is really good at it because one of the things of because of his abilities or we would label him as disabled is his ability to genuinely listen. He listens to all of these calls, sometimes fairly nasty because the people have had boots put on their cars for not paying parking tickets, integrates how well the person handling the call response and he does it all and uploads it to his boss.

And I tell them all the time that I tell his story because he was one of the first to actually work this job and he always gets very excited that his story is something other people with disabilities like him have that opportunity.

We gradually help people move, one foot in the door, one foot out, and we really focused on really learning to be really good at customizing focused employment.

Another reason for the training and technical assistance.

And huge amounts of communication. Meetings, newsletters, social media, I went every Tuesday to the coffee shop around the

corner and invited families and individuals and people in the community to come and talk about this.

So that is very key as people transform.

There's lots of reasons why people perceive for keeping the status quo.

Families are afraid, people are afraid, this is new, changes hard, but we have learned to do a lot of changing during this pandemic.

And we have proven that none of these myths are true.

People are ready to work. And when you discover their talents you can do a good job matching their ability to the needs of the employer whose bottom line and workplace culture is improved by their presence.

Businesses can't or won't hire people with I/DD at prevailing wages. Yes they do, they do every day, there are huge nationwide companies that are making hiring people with disabilities initiatives that they commit to. I will show you some statistics in just a minute.

People will work fewer hours and have a lot of model time and families will be impacted. Yes, some people work fewer hours and I will show you those numbers too.

There are also ways to help people be connected in the community in integrated ways that help fill in those hours, and one of the biggest things about ours is the benefit cliff. So there is legislation that we need to focus on that will make that an event cliff not the cliff that it is particularly for medical services and Medicaid services because people with disabilities need to be able to generate wealth like anyone else and escape poverty.

People won't be accepted in the workplace and won't have friends. They have lots of friends.

People change workplaces. If you have a minute go to the webpage and watch videos of coworkers and people with disabilities that they work with. It's amazing.

And people when you say they want to work here, they will say yes because they know nothing else. And by the end of our

transformation every single person wanted a job in the community and every single person -- I was in the 10 or so that moved away, was happy with their job.

So this is the outcomes and these are only through September 2020 because our fiscal year just ended. So we are compiling a whole other year of statistics to this.

We are only able to serve 10 or 15 people year when we had three sheltered workshops. Now that we are community integrated employment we have served, and I think [can't understand] up to 800 now and I want to get my new numbers in soon.

800 new people, people, students with disabilities, significant disabilities, transitioning out of high school into a real job instead of being told by the school district and the doctor and anyone else that would talk to them all well they are never going to work or if they do it's a sheltered workshop for them.

I know we placed about 50 people even during the pandemic. So now we are over 650 job starts. And our average wages about \$14 an hour which is going to go up, the Washington wages going up, minimum wages going up, good thing for employees, everyone should earn a livable wage, businesses are handling it well here.

Hours range from 8 to 40, average hours his 19, I really told you we serve 450 people.

For those worried about business results as I said we went from \$3 million when we closed the workshops to \$7 million and we are growing, we are probably going to add a couple of million dollars in business this year despite of the pandemic and financially stable and solid.

We divested ourselves a businesses that could not stand on their own paying people prevailing wages.

We are not going to have a business that in my opinion exploitable labor of people with disabilities in order to make the bottom line. So we got rid of the ones that we couldn't make work and we added new business lines, and now we have a diverse workforce of many abilities across our Board of Directors, across our leadership team, across our company and in the businesses that we operate.

And we did that while maintaining opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities because the customize jobs in our own businesses the same way that the business community does as well.

So that's our story. And I think one of the things that is key in Washington is that we all have this passion and have moved in that direction together, and the support and mentoring that we have offered each other.

So I think the next slide is Ivanova, my good friend Ivanova. She might tell you how we met. October has been a big month for us because NDEAM in my Facebook, all of these memories of Ivanova keep popping up like the day her daughter walked for the first time when we are presenting together and a Community Employment Alliance conference, and she is so cute, Ivanova picks her up and hugs her and I am like I've got it, of got it! Or when she was at the Peninsula community college which is the little college up near Port Angeles, my hometown, where she was giving a presentation there. My sister works there so I got pictures of her hanging out with my sister. It's all very cool.

So I am really pleased to have the opportunity to introduce of ANOVA Smith, AtWork! activist advocate and many other roles in the advocacy community that she holds.

Ivanova, we can't hear you.

>> IVANOVA SMITH: Testing, testing, can you hear me now?

Can you hear me now?

>> We can hear you.

>> IVANOVA SMITH: Thank you so much Chris for that wonderful introduction. Chris Brandt is a wonderful friend and also an epic boss.

I met Chris back in 2015 for the 25th Americans With Disabilities Act rally, and I gave a speech there and that was when we first and in the sheltered workshop in the subminimum wage, and we are very excited about it.

That was just in the beginning of my advocacy journey on that particular issue.

I am a leader in the self advocacy community here in Washington state and currently the chair of self advocates in leadership, SAIL, and we are fully led by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We also work very closely with people first of Washington which is a community self advocacy organization, and they are made up of over 1000 members. And we do a lot of policy work for people with I/DD in protecting our civil rights.

Many of our members were paid subminimum wages. They worked in the sheltered workshops. They felt the pain of being in that environment and being paid those wages.

My personal story on that front is I was not paid subminimum wages myself, but I was abused in a segregated work environment. It was very hard to get out of. So I do feel that perspective when I hear members say that they had a hard time getting out of jobs like that even if they wanted to.

A lot of times it's hard to speak up, and that was true for many of our members. But we became very passionate about it, and I worked with other members who were paid subminimum wage like my good colleague Anthony Nash and John Lemus. And John Lemus has really led this bill that has finally ended subminimum wage in Washington.

And it took a lot of work. And there are pitfalls, there are things that we had to learn. We really had to connect with our partners like the developmental disability Council, the state ARC and ARC chapters. We really had to work with families and talk to providers and talk to families and people who did have concerns about what is going to happen if this is done, and I don't want to lose my hours. There were a lot of people concerned about losing hours.

And it was really important that we listened to those concerns and strategize with people about those concerns because we want to make sure that this bill was done smoothly.

And there are pitfalls. There are things that we had to learn. Originally the first bill that we did, it didn't complete the process fully. And I think a lot of it had to do with because there was some focus on wanting to just rush it through and not have a transition time or a phaseout of subminimum wage.

So we had to work with self advocates to figure out hey, we actually want to take time with this. We don't want to just rush it through. We really want to take time and make sure that there will be transition time and there will be transition support for folks to be transitioned into work environments that they are happy in and that people don't lose the hours that they want to work.

We want to figure out solutions to those concerns. We don't want to just brush them aside.

And so we worked with people first and SAIL and the providers and family groups, the ARCs, and the Community Employment Alliance was very helpful with that. And so was the association of people supporting employment first, they are a national organization but they also have local chapters and so they are also a very great partner to have in helping with the efforts.

And John Lemus and I after the first bill did not fully complete [can't understand] able to get it done for state employees, but we need to get it done for the private sector. So John Lemus and I worked on that and we did strategy and we are like okay, let's talk about these concerns that people have. Let's be bipartisan about this too, let's make sure that we can get people from both sides of the aisle in on this issue and supporting it.

And he didn't amazing job getting sponsors and also other disability advocates like my other colleague Anthony. We were able to connect with his legislators as well.

And I think trying to be more broad and trying to reach out to everyone, I think that was something that was very positive, and that really helped us in our advocacy efforts.

So what I would say to other states that are really passionate about implementing this is make sure you get all of the self advocates involved. Make sure that all of the advocates with lived experience are given support to testify.

It doesn't matter if they need support with communication, you should figure out a way to get them that support, whether it is writing down their testimony for them so they have a written copy of their testimony, and also giving the physical testimony. I actually did that for a self advocate friend of mine. He wanted me to help him right up a little script of his testimony before going up there so that he could -- so that if his

communication became confusing, he had a written version of it for them to understand.

So that is just an example of something that is really important to do in supporting all self advocates who need help in writing their testimony or saying their testimony, that they get the support.

And one thing that was really beneficial this last year because of the pandemic, we had to do everything remotely. And that meant we had to -- it meant there was actually more participation. People who would have the majority of the time had issues with transportation and not been able to get down to Olympia are all of a sudden now able to get down to Olympia and do their testimony. So that is really important, to make sure they have support in that.

And lastly I would just say thanking your legislators, thinking your champions, really celebrating their contributions to this. And really helping the people with lived experience connect with their legislator in their district.

And so I think that's everything that I need to say. But I also know want to give it to Courtney who is an awesome executive director for the Community Employment Alliance and who has been a big champion and an ally to the self advocate community. Take it away, Courtney.

>> COURTNEY WILLIAMS: I don't really know how to follow that, Ivanova. You told the story beautifully. But I am going to try and if I can fill in any other spots, I'm excited to do so.

Would you go to the next slide Eric?

So I would love to talk to you a little bit about what the Community Employment Alliance's role is and what the CEA is. We are a membership organization comprised of 38 service employment providers who provide the supportive services for individuals with disabilities.

I always try to explain it and some folks looking Indo understand it especially when they are not in our world. So as I do my husband is a bunch of competitors all working for the same mission because at the end of the day they really care about the person at the center making sure that equitable and inclusion services are always there for them.

This year the Community Employment Alliance got asked to champion the bill to eliminate subminimum wage. What that means is we are reached out to by our friends at the developmental disability Council and asked can you guys take the lead on this and rally the troops and really try to get this bill passed this time because as Ivanova mentioned before it didn't. There was a lot of ebbs and flows and the timing might not have been right.

So we came and decided that we were going to do this. And what I think is crucial, and if any other state who is on this call is wanting to do this, it is crucial to have self advocates lead this effort.

What that means is we have a legislative community as part of CEA, and we assign two self advocates, Ivanova being one, the other being John Lemus who was actually paid subminimum wage.

They told us what needs to happen to ensure this happens effectively this time.

So I want to acknowledge some of the folks in this room. I am not sure who or where you stand when it comes to eliminating subminimum wage. This is very personal and there is a lot of history that comes into play and there is a sense of security on both sides that could be impacted, and I want to say that I understand.

And I would really encourage at the end of this presentation we have our contact information, please reach out to us. We would love to be supportive to anyone that is needing to have the full picture. We welcome all conversations, there is no judgment. We just want to be helping our friends at the end of the day get a wage that they deserve, and that is at the very least minimum-wage.

So our self advocates have lived this and a big part of what we did next is really trying to find the champion when it comes to the legislative component.

We found Senator Randall, Senator Emily Randall, and Representative [can't understand] to be those two individuals. And the big reason is everyone thinks Washington State is very liberal. The truth of the matter is we are actually very spread out. Out of the 39 counties in Washington there are 32 that are rural. So we are up against a lot to ensure this bill gets passed.

More importantly our self advocates wanted to do their due diligence and to get this passed bipartisan. That was a huge deal because that shows that we really truly educated all parties involved on the why and the now.

So we did just that, really took our time, we are very strategic. And in the process of getting this bill passed, in the house it passed 47 with seven no's and in the Senate it passed 47 yeses, seven no's, in the house it passed a 75 yeses with 22 nos.

That was an extremely big deal. We also knew that the timing was right. Ivanova mentioned that previously when this bill was pushed it was very, very quickly pushed and there were not a lot of moving pieces identified. Therefore a lot of folks felt disconnected and not up to speed when it comes to all of the nuances.

We know we are in a pandemic. This is a real time to embrace this healthy change that everyone can benefit from. Helping communities recognize resources, we knew there was a declining trend of 14Cs being distributed. And Washington State there were less than 250, the majority on the east side of the state.

So we really knew how to isolate those resources and really work with legislators in that arena again all led by self advocates. When writing the legislation self advocates helped with this. It was critical that we put the transition period like the federal legislation as because we do not want folks to fall through the gaps.

This is not a punishment for anybody. This is not a punishment for employers who have paid some minimum-wage and it's not a punishment for families who have supported it. It is to really ensure that the focus is on the individual who needs that wage to be fair.

So we wanted to make sure that we are doing everything we could do not let anyone fall through the cracks.

We also knew that the training assistance being offered in the bill would be critical and really explained why and how that would work to families and communities. Our self advocates and our allies did an excellent job with that.

And another part of getting this to the finish line is really understanding the best practices. And Chris Brandt and Ivanova

mentioned this, but having all parties when it comes to the community lined up and ready to understand the complexities of services for individuals with disabilities, that means we have to talk to one another.

We tend to maybe silo in when it comes to our services when it comes to individuals with disabilities, but these are individuals that need all hands on deck. And so schools, the state, counties, providers, communities, families, advocates, we all really had to work together to understand the overall needs and individualize that support. So we did just that.

A critical part of our legislation that I think would be helpful to other states and other organizations and advocacy associations that may be wanting to do this is there is a fiscal note to our bill. It is small so I understand that we are in a pandemic and some state legislators -- they say they don't have the money.

It is 266,000 and it is designed to be a project based position through our state to really monitor and make sure the working certificate holders are transitioning in ways that are supportive so that communities, families, the individual never has to fall through the cracks and they always have their needs met.

At the end of the day if you look at the Department of Labor you will see that there is about 1200 organizations nationally that hold 14C certificates, there is 16,000 either being issued or pending, and those numbers ebb and flow and change.

That's not a lot, and if we think about that that is not a lot. You can also sort it and see what states.

And I would really encourage everyone to understand the state that is holding those certificates and really customize anything that could be beneficial to all parties involved with this legislation.

Look at other states that have done it. A lot of states did it prior to Washington, we are not the first, but we customized it to fit Washington because we knew the demographics of our communities.

So that is really what CEA's role was. We are the vehicle but the prime focus and the reason why we are successful is self advocates who had been subjected to this pay for so many years

told us it's time, and they did it in a way that no one else could have done it.

They have the emotional intelligence to look folks in the eyes who actually said no, you deserve some minimum-wage, to explain and educate. And I think that in itself is the most flawless part of our whole success in Washington state.

If you go to the next slide it has our contact information. I would really love for everyone to reach out to the Community Employment Alliance. I am a new Executive Director, I you just in time to work with this legislation and I am so excited that I did.

But we have organizations such as AtWork!, other organizations, work opportunities, and they have all gone through a transition period. And it is not easy.

But when you have associations like the Community Employment Alliance working together to ensure that providers feel that support and that communities and friends and allies feel that support, it's very possible.

So please let us know if you need anything, we would really love to have a conversation and again wherever you stand on the side of this issue, we would like to have that conversation to help educate and realize all of the nuances.

We know it's different everywhere and we are not saying our way is the way, but this way for Washington State was impactful. We really felt it this year.

Thank you.

>> ALICIA EPSTEIN: Thank you so much, that was wonderful Chris, Ivanova, and Courtney for sharing your perspective and what happened in Washington State.

Just a few quick takeaways. I think for each individual it is a different journey, a different experience. What works for one might not work for another, and is just really important to be able to identify the different challenges and to recognize what alliances you have, what partners you can collaborate with, and identify which state legislatures are the champions and to be able to work very closely with them as well as family.

And most importantly to really let it be led by the self advocates and let them lead that effort.

So before I wrap up and transition to the second panel, I just want to quickly say that there are current efforts being led by President Biden to be able to phase out 14C FLSA, and he has pledged several different ways within the federal agencies for them to be able to take the lead while Congress is in process of moving through the specific legislation.

The included funding in the Build Back Better act, BBB act, to be able to support the states to help them with transition from 14C to competitive integrated employment.

From the most recent version that is available on the house committee of education and labor, about \$300 million will be available, and I know earlier today there was new information, a new update for the framework.

Untrained to look for that information but I am happy to share anything as we go through it.

The second thing is that earlier last month the US AbilityOne commission published a proposed rule to phase out 14C certificates on the AbilityOne contracts. Proposed comments close November 12, so if anyone has not seen the Federal Register I would encourage you to look there and submit comments.

And with that I want to wrap up and give everyone -- we are just going to have a one minute break and then we will transition to the second panel, and again thank you so much to the first panel for sharing your perspective and your personal experience. It is highly valued and very inspiring, so thank you.

I am going to pass this over to Alex.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: Great. Thank you Alicia. I think we have a one minute break but I will just be talking for a little bit and we can get started.

Thank you everyone on the first panel, that was really interesting and great information for everyone on the call here.

Let me just quickly introduce myself. I put that in the chat. I am Alex Bennewith, VP of United Spinal association which is an association that assists individuals with physical disabilities

across the country. We obviously work on advocacy and education and resources for people with all types of physical disabilities, so it keeps us busy.

And I'm very happy to be here to talk with our panelists for panel 2, and I will just frame the panel a little bit and then introduce our wonderful panelists and we will get right into the conversation.

Each one of our panelists have individual expertise which is really interesting to share for everyone. So why don't we get started.

I want to different the discussion a little bit first. We all know that Covid has impacted all of us and we have all had to adjust to this new virtual world we are living in.

Covid has shown a light on the challenges the disability community have been facing for decades. Technology enables many of us to work remotely, learn virtually, with health care providers, and connect with loved ones. And with more Americans staying at home and working from home due to the Covid pandemic, much of our lives have been redirected online.

Broadband connectivity has become a vital tool for engaging with the world and engaging in work, and we cannot go backwards.

This panel will be addressing three important issues impacting employment challenges for people with disabilities. Attitudinal and technology barriers for remote workers with disabilities, as well as the impacts Covid has had on the workforce specifically people with disabilities.

And to give you some context here, according to the centers for disease control and prevention one in four Americans has some type of disability, so that is 61 million adults in the United States.

And interestingly according to a pew research Center study just from a few years ago, adults who report having a disability are less likely to have multiple devices that enable them to go online to do work and to do other things.

One in four disabled adults say they have high-speed Internet at home, smartpone, a desktop, or a laptop computer and a tablet.

Obviously this is not enough considering we know there are 61 million people in the disabled -- in the disability community, and many of us obviously want to work, want to find opportunities to work. And we will go through some of those things in the next couple of minutes.

So why don't I just introduce briefly the panelists and I really want them to talk about their own experiences and their background so that you don't have to listen to me.

So really happy to introduce Michaela Devins, she is the interim director of our tech Access initiative and a mental health counselor at United Spinal association. She has been a quadriplegic for 11 years. She attended grad school at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and completed her Masters of art in professional mental health counseling.

She now works at an outpatient mental health facility in Center City Philadelphia, and wants -- and was previously and now she works in the Boston area, and she is working toward getting her licensure and hope to someday build a private practice that will specifically cater to the mental health needs of people with disabilities, which is wonderful.

Nelly Nieblas will be speaking as well. She is the manager of policy, adversity, and engagement at RespectAbility which is a nonprofit organization fighting stigmas so that people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of the community, and she has some key experience with a lot of her work in the state of California that I would love her to highlight as we get into her talking about her experiences and we look forward to hearing from her.

Wade Wingler is the vice president of Easterseals crossroads and provides a wide variety of quality innovative services to people with disabilities and their families. He has been working there for decades, wait I think you told me it was over 30 years of something which is amazing, and obviously he has a host of certifications and expertise in assistive technology including teaching classes at Indiana University on disability, accessibility, and technology.

So instead of me just saying that I would love each of them to speak for themselves about their issues.

I'm going to start off with Michaela. Thank you Michaela for joining, I would love to hear about some of your challenges,

attitudinal, technological issues that you have had to face looking at employment, finding employment, etc. So over to you Michaela.

>> MICHAELA DEVINS: Absolutely, thank you so much for introducing me. Like you said I have been a quadriplegic for a little over 11 years and in that time I started out in education, and I remember my first experiences with applying for jobs.

Really wasn't sure what was possible for me. But I was having a moment where for the first time in the few years since I had been injured I was starting to take some pride in my identity as a disabled person.

And realizing the ways in which it caused me to grow and to be an innovator and to think critically and the way it deepened my empathy and my organizational skills.

So I was starting to realize all of the ways that I had grown and become potentially a better candidate because of my disability.

So I think a little naïvely I would include that on my cover letters. And I wasn't getting any interviews. Zero.

I had a really good GPA, I had experience as a tutor, so I was really confused. I couldn't understand why no one wanted to hire me.

I had a conversation with someone about it and they said well, maybe think about just taking this part out of your cover letter that discloses your disability. And I was a little offended by that it first, but then I thought okay. I took it out and I started getting interviews.

So I share this as a premise to the idea that I think the biggest barrier that I face as someone with a disability who tries to access work are the attitudinal barriers. The idea that people with disabilities aren't hireable, that we need too much or that the accommodations are too difficult. That is the biggest barrier I face.

I found it much easier to access accommodations and to overcome that barrier of attitude in the education space in the sense of being a student going back to grad school.

But then again trying to enter the workforce after grad school, going to interviews to be a mental health counselor, I went to in person interviews where I noticed people's faces shift as soon as they saw me. I have a very visible apparent disability. I use a power wheelchair. And I felt from that moment that I had already been written off and they are going to listen to what I wanted to say.

Even though from my resume and cover letter they had decided that I was a potentially good candidate.

So that process was really disheartening and it was a lesson in perseverance. And I found that the job environments where I was welcomed and where my experience in my perspective was seen as a strength, those are environments that I wanted to be in. And that first job in Center City Philadelphia that Alex mentioned, I was valued and accommodations were not seen as an issue.

And I really brought something to that space with my perspective because I was the only wheelchair user in the entire office.

And it also brought a lot of the therapy space and my work with clients, and continues to there is a shared understanding when clients come into my office and see me for the first time that oh, she has been through something too. She gets it. There is almost an immediate building of rapport and trust and I find it much easier to connect with people because of that.

When people come into the mental health clinic for sometimes their very first experience with therapy, it's really intimidating and you are in a very difficult place. And the visual reminder that I have been through difficult things is a real asset to my work as a mental health counselor.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: I'm going to ask you a question about that Michaela. You said you have another job and you have said how welcoming they are to you and understanding regarding accommodations, but you explained an interesting story about getting some of those accommodations. Could you share that with the audience?

>> MICHAELA DEVINS: Yes, absolutely. And I will actually start by rewinding a little bit to my job search before I landed the role I am in now.

I was offered a position at a different organization and was ready to take it. I actually agreed and signed a contract.

And then I disclosed to them, because one of the interesting things about Covid and doing job interviews virtually is that you probably can't tell from this vantage point that I am a wheelchair user and that I am disabled.

So for the first time in my life I have the option of not disclosing my disability until I was offered a job.

That changed things a little bit. I was offered a job at this previous organization, and then I disclosed that I am a quadriplegic wheelchair user and here are the accommodations that I need.

All of a sudden they are dragging their feet. I felt that they were being purposely obtuse about understanding the accommodations that I was asking for.

And I decided after some conversations with my husband and friends and some real soul-searching that I did not want to work with this organization. It was a clear indicator to me that they didn't really value me as an employee.

So fast forward to the job that I am in now, I am so glad I declined that other offer because as Alex mentioned it is an extremely supportive environment. Any accommodation I ask for, they immediately if not agree then open a conversation about it where they really want to understand what I need.

Even within that though which is I think the point that Alex was wanting me to get to, it is still difficult sometimes because accommodations are so personal. And so specific to each individual.

It's hard to know sometimes what to ask for, went to ask for it, and how to ask.

So I think employers can really step in and say I have noticed you are having an issue with X, Y or Z, how can I accommodate you, what about this, what about that, right? So not putting the onus on the disabled person all of the time to figure out when to asking how to ask and what do ask for.

I am issued a work laptop and they wanted me to come pick it up, and transportation has been an issue for me in the Boston area. It's been really difficult for me to navigate. So I was bending over backwards trying to figure out how to get to this place to

pick up the laptop 40 minutes away. And by the way I work remotely in this position.

And there were emails back and forth about when can you pick it up. That went on for a couple of months. Until finally someone stepped in and said you know, would you like us to mail it to you? And I said yes, that would be so much easier.

A very simple accommodation that probably I could've asked for or it could have been offered much earlier. It would have saved everyone a lot of time and effort.

But that's the dance, right? And so employers I think can really step in and make that happen. And that was someone on the HR side of things that said why don't we just send it to you. And that is something that I am sort of consistently navigating around.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: Absolutely, and before we go over to Nelly I wanted to address briefly your role as a mental health counselor and how important that is been for people with disabilities and for everyone as we have been dealing with this pandemic. The whole shift towards being at home more or being out of work or whatever it is. I would love you to address that in the context of work too, the need of support for people.

>> MICHAELA DEVINS: Absolutely. So not only is there a wonderful option for me to be able to work remotely, and that gives me access to work that I would necessarily have otherwise. It has been beneficial to many of my clients.

Single parents who are trying to juggle their work and their kids' schedule. Folks that find it difficult to access transportation like I do. I have had really great success with having people consistently make their appointments, whereas before when I was seeing people in person I had a lot of no-shows, I have a lot of cancellations.

And so ideally I think we move forward with a hybrid model. Telehealth is a reasonable accommodation, not just for disabled folks but for everyone.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: Absolutely.

>> MICHAELA DEVINS: We have seen that in this pandemic and it is essential that it continues.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: Thank you so much Michaela, really important. And obviously we support access to telehealth and to be able to work in excess telehealth, people need broadband and that is another related issue that I know [can't understand] has been active on and I know other groups in this space have been doing as well.

Thank you Michaela. I wanted to hand it over to Nelly Nieblas, and I didn't go into specifics about the fact that you were appointed legislation and public information manager at the California State Council on developmental disabilities by Governor Jerry Brown among many other things in California.

So Nelly, please talk a little bit about some of the challenges that you have faced. And I know you can speak specifically about transition, youth transition issues and accommodation issues from your perspective. I would love to hear that.

You just need to take yourself off mute.

>> NELLY NIEBLAS: All right, thank you Alex. Yes, I can actually speak to being a congressional staffer. That was my actual job right out of college. I was a Congressional Hispanic Caucus fellow which allowed me to work for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and also Congressman Cesar Rodriguez.

And one of the key things besides the monumental moving from California to Washington DC and learning all of the intricate transportation ins and outs and accommodations, one of the key things that I had to advocate for was for my voice to text software and also a screen reader.

For them I was the first fellow that they have ever had to deal with that at accommodations. And back then, back in the early 2000s, it was just a shock. And it is still a shock. I still hear that people are still battling for having informational technology infrastructure just as basic as having a camera to be able to have zoom meetings.

Back when I was working training and onboarding was not provided on how to use the technology that I was given. And at school before transitioning into the workforce that training and transition did not happen. So I was on my own and I was the one had to detail this is the type of program I want, this is the type of RAM the computer needs. All of the specs were left up to me and it was left up to me to dictate how the accommodations

were supposed to be accommodated. There was no coordinator or specialist available to actually assess what my needs were.

So let's just say my early 20s was a lot of this is what I need, this is what I want, and expecting no one to be there when I first arrived. A lot of my 20s.

As I moved forward I actually had to make my HR person my team member. And most of the time with HR specialists it was kind of like well, I have never had a person with a disability be hired at this level. That speaks to the kind of jobs I was pursuing which were high level executive administrative level jobs that most people don't expect people with disabilities to have, much less a Person of Color with a disability to have.

I would sit them down and say we are art team here. This is what I need. This is so I can get it and give you the resource you can call to get the specs. And after that they asked me to do trainings on how to speak to people with disabilities when they are hired and when they are asked the uncomfortable question of what kind of accommodations will you need to.

So I had to become the teacher in the process of also learning my professional role. You know, later on I was fortunate enough to go to the Harvard Kennedy school, and in that process accommodations were given.

Some of the expectations are actually uplifted and said okay, this is what you are expecting, let's give you everything you need from a screen reader to speech to text to extended time on tests. And I was like did I enter the twilight zone here? Because when I came back, when I came out of Harvard I expected things to be equally the same. But it did. Again it was on me, had to work as a team with HR, I had to be very sure not to come across as angry and be very receptive because there is a fear that people with disabilities need accommodations are going to bite your head off.

No we are not, we are actually trying to work with you as a team.

And I was fortunate enough to be appointed by Governor Jerry Brown, and I worked for the Council on developmental disabilities on youth transition programs as well as Medi-Cal coverage for youth.

And a lot of that work was focused on trying to get people with disabilities who wanted to work, whether out of high school or into college, the right accommodations needed, funding for the transition services needed for people with disabilities, of all disabilities, not just intellectual and developmental, to be able to have that access and the assessments.

One of the biggest bills I was proud of was requiring the superintendent of schools to actually require teachers to have basic understanding of what the signs are of a child having dyslexia. That was particularly special to me as a person with dyslexia on top of having this physical disability.

So that particular gem required it in state law or teachers to actually be aware of what the signs are of dyslexia and what to do after. So that was one of the proudest accomplishments of my tenure there.

But now I am with RespectAbility and I'm working on employment policy as well as educational policy to make it more equitable for people with disabilities, and one of my proudest projects is [can't understand] across the state of California to address barriers to employment and working with state actors as well as nonprofits and advocates to actually address what legislative barriers people face in getting funding for accessible accommodations as well as actual having barriers between agencies come down so they talk to each other.

One agency might specialize in helping people with disabilities. Another agency might help with people who are coming out of corrections. But the overlap of people being in corrections and possibly having disabilities, that link doesn't happen unless organizations and people say you should be talking to each other and this is what you have in common and we are happy to help.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: That's wonderful, so valuable what you are doing. And I am asking this question on purpose, I have a point.

So how long have you been working on this issue in California?

>> NELLY NIEBLAS: If you were to ask me honestly, apart from my current job it would have been 15 years. 15 years of working --

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: 15 years on convening and trying to get agencies to work together and trying to communicate better and explaining all of the challenges. That's a lot of time. And

that is one state. It's a big state but it's one state. There are 49 other states.

So my point is for a congressional staff on the phone year, on the video here, we need to do more. We need to do better. And I do want -- if there is anything else Nelly that you wanted to highlight as I transition over to Wade's, but I did want to make that point.

You are doing all of this great work but again it is one state. So we need to look at this differently and I know the first panel addressed legislation that we can get passed and other things.

But is there anything else you would like to highlight related to college funding or anything like that that I know we talked about before?

>> NELLY NIEBLAS: The workforce innovation and opportunity act is one of the key funding streams for employment for people who are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

My whole advocacy or point of policy would be to actually bring funding streams together from colleges, universities, and community colleges that work with people with disabilities to work with these programs so they can build off of each other's assessments and equipment so that when the person wants to work into a job that [can't understand] is offering, the onboarding is much easier.

So having funding streams that are coordinated and also having those two entities talk to each other so the person who was actually being employed has all of the accommodations they need.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: Absolutely, excellent point Nelly. Thank you for highlighting that.

I'm going to go over to Wade. Thank you Nelly.

Wade how many years hasn't been that you have been at Easterseals?

>> WADE WINGLER: Alex, 28. Almost 30.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: I gave you too many years. Sorry. It is decades. It is decades. And really you have heard from

Nelly, you heard from Michaela about all of the personal challenges they have had to face and that is just two people.

We have 61 million people potentially out there, right?

Tell us a little bit about what you do in more detail obviously and some of the things you have had to do with and trying to match people to the right technology in the right accommodations.

>> WADE WINGLER: Absolutely, and Alex thank you for hosting, and Nelly and Michaela, thanks for your stories. Not only are those some important accomplishments but the challenges you are outlining sound familiar to me both the historical ones and the more recent ones. That rings true so thank you for sharing those stories.

Me, first and foremost I'm a husband and dad, of got three great kids. I am vice president at Easterseals crossroads which I oversee about half of our organization service line and that includes our assistive technology programs and although I have done a number of universities I still currently teach at Purdue here in Indiana and that class is fun because I get to teach K-12 educators about how to make the curriculum more accessible to kids with disabilities from universal design and assistive technology perspectives.

So it's fun because I get to see the system with Littles up through folks who are working in the aging process.

I work out of the Indianapolis affiliate for Easterseals, Easterseals crossroads. We are a pretty broad organization and we do services for all leeches and we do things like you might expect like physical therapy and speech therapy, job placement for individual disabilities, Autism services, community day supports.

Today I want to hone in on the assistive technology aspect of what we do.

We have a 30+-year-old clinical assistive technology program and what that means for us at least is we are in the nuts and bolts and the nitty-gritty of the job accommodation process all the time.

So both Nelly and Michaela alluded to the fact that something people don't know what they don't know when it comes to the job

accommodation process or a hiring manager or HR manager might be just like I won't say anything because I don't know what to do for a technical perspective.

Our clinical technology program has really looked at that intersection for 30+ years where we have a high degree of understanding about the needs of individuals with disabilities broadly and we spend time getting to know individuals with disabilities specifically and what their limitations and what their strengths are so that we can help figure out some of those technical challenges related to how to do the accommodation process.

So I want to talk about Covid because there has been an interesting impact there I think, but I also want to mention that another thing we do in our assistive technology program that is relevant is we try to share technical details and we try to share information about the accommodation process and assistive technology.

We have a few podcasts on that topic. We have been proud to be named the number one podcast in the world on that topic in fact, so wherever you get your podcasts, input the word assistive, you will find a show called assistive technology update or ATFAQ, AT is assistive technology and FAQ is frequently asked questions.

It's a calling panel shows that we have people with disabilities, employers, other interested folks calling and saying longtime listener for some color in the mask a question and we have a panel of experts who can answer that not only for the benefit of the individual calling but to share around the world. We have an audience in 160 countries.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: That's wonderful, that's really great.

>> WADE WINGLER: It's a great resource, it's free and available and we would love to have you all in our audience.

We also have a lending library which I will talk more. We are the assistive technology act federally funded program for the state of Indiana. That means we have a number of services that we offer including device demonstration to show people who are interested in particular assistive technology so they work.

We do a refurbishing program we actually take used or pre-used assistive technology and fix it up and provide it at no cost to the state of Indiana who have need.

And then we have a lending library just like a public library where you can check out assistive technologies for 30 days. That is super helpful for an individual with a disability who just want to try the latest and greatest thing that is out there or for an employer or sometimes IT students to check out different keyboards and interfaces and different devices to see will it work, can we play with this in advance of a job accommodation situation or as part of the job accommodation process to determine where it would be helpful.

And our lending library is an Indiana only lending library, but all of US states and territories have equivalent services and we can point you to a local one.

ATAP org dot org is a good website to go to that lists all of the state project and lending library. Search for ATAP and assistive in the Google machine will find that and give it to you and you can find your local, or if you reach out to us we are happy to direct you to your local lending library.

[CROSSTALK]

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: I was going to ask you a question and you can chime in and how you want to answer it. We did talk about this before. If you could explain a little bit about the process of how you match individuals with disabilities with the tech they need. Michaela and Nelly would have benefited from your expertise when they had started out. Just the process of that. It's navigating it, the nitty-gritty for people with disabilities that they need to know and what they need to do and how you work with them and with the employer's.

>> WADE WINGLER: Yeah, you better. That process is in some ways universal and with the individuals that we are working with, sometimes we are working in the background and you never know we are there and that's also when that can happen.

Generally there is even a more individually driven process where people with individuals or employers are trying technology and doing the do-it-yourself model which I think is pretty common.

And when that works that's great.

Then there are times when we are asked to come in and provide an evaluation, and then that is when we bring in our team of experts who spend time getting to know the individual, what

their experience is in terms of educational background, medical, work, technology experience, preferences and desires and those kind of things.

Then we work with the employer to figure out what are the essential functions of the job and one of the things that you also want done that aren't essential because we want to apples on our radar as we are talking about the job accommodation process.

And then as specified in the ADA we tried to help facilitate that iterative process where there was a little bit a back and forth and some conversation and some push and pull between the employee, employer, and all of the other forces at play.

Firewalls and IT components and all of the practical tangible pieces of the job accommodation process.

Through that process then our staff work out a list of recommendations and that includes a list of hardware and software sometimes that need to be procured, where to get it, we try to help with the bidding process and get the bids upfront so that speeds up the process as much as possible.

Many times we will pull equipment from our lending library and put it in place temporarily if we think that is the correct accommodation.

Sometimes we will go through a couple of iterations of that where we put a couple of devices and to see what works best and then we help with the installation, with the support on the ongoing training is necessary related to that.

So again sometimes we are in the background and that stuff has been done by any or all of the parties involved, and sometimes we are front and center because an accommodation can sometimes be a little more costly, more time intensive, and take a couple of iterations before we get a successful job accommodation done.

And then we come back because if this goes well people stay on the job long enough that their equipment got upgraded or they get promoted or they have other needs that can be addressed.

So the relationships we have tend to be more long-standing.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: Right. It is a complicated issue and appreciate all of your expertise on that.

It reminds me of the computer electronics accommodations program at the Department of Defense where initially back in October, 2000, Congress granted this program to provide accommodations to employees across federal agencies. And unfortunately effectively 2020 that was limited to just the DOD.

Obviously we support our veterans and we love all people that work at the DOD to have the accommodations they need, but it is unfortunate that it no longer applies at the moment to the rest of the federal agencies.

And again a note to our congressional staff that's on in the audience, I know the administration has been pushing and working hard to recruit more people with disabilities into the administration but without the CAP program it is difficult for people with disabilities to have the right accommodations they need without additional support.

And as you can tell from what Wade was saying and from Michaela and Nelly, it's very personal. It takes a lot of detail to figure out what works. And there is no real pathway. Each one finds their own best way, best accommodations.

Of course we have to recognize the great job that DOL in the office of disability employment policy does with their resources from the partnership for employment assistance technology to be job accommodation network, employee assistance and resource network and the LEAD center which is around leadership and employment and academic development for people with disabilities. Those are all great.

But challenges still remain as we all know.

So I did want to just call out to anyone who wanted to chime in just briefly before I have some closing thoughts. Any of our panelists, wait, Michaela, or Nelly, as you were thinking about this as we were talking. Some of the things you would like to see from employers or some of the additional challenges that you have faced that you did mention earlier.

>> WADE WINGLER: I will quickly mention is one of the ah-ha's for my friends and colleagues to use assistive technology in a post Covid or during Covid or whatever phase we are in right now, the new working on an object model is they have had to be adaptable. And we have all had to be adaptable. And I have heard routinely you folks who haven't had to go to the

accommodations I have are finally starting to figure out some of the challenges and how you have to do it on your own and yet your laptop screen is now sitting on a bunch of Kleenex boxes because you had to do your own home ergonomics and you had to drag a lamp out from the guest room and put it on your desk so you had to figure out some of these adaptation and accommodation think so I've heard a lot of my friends and colleagues say you see you are starting to realize some of the challenges we have dealt with in your overcoming them, right.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: Nelly and Michaela, please chime in just before I close the loop.

>> MICHAELA DEVINS: Yeah, I would just love to say that we work hard and we will continue to work hard to advocate for people with disabilities in the workforce.

But from my perspective I feel like it would be incredible to see companies, organizations take the initiative to reach out to us. Reach out to the disabled workforce. We are here, we are talented, we want to work for you. Make this part of your initiatives. Include us in DEI. Right? I feel like people disabilities, the community gets left behind when we talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

So really make that effort. We are here. I would love to see that kind of outreach from their end of things.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: Thank you Michaela. Nelly, what would you like to say?

>> NELLY NIEBLAS: Michaela stole my point.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: You can say it as well.

>> NELLY NIEBLAS: It's excellent. I am thinking exactly what Michaela said. Including disability in your DEI committees. And if you have a hiring committee please include someone with a disability to be on it.

I look at different people that receive grants to do community work. Make sure to look at people with disabilities as part of your workforce, is bringing assets to the table. And for grantors to actually consider grants for research and programs for people with disabilities.

We are the invisible giant that does not get funded. So we must be able to be seen at the table where decisions are being made, hiring decisions are being made, and equity and equality issues are being talked about.

>> ALEXANDRA BENNEWITH: Absolutely, absolutely. And as you have heard from the panelists, our community has to adapt, has to figure out how to do things.

So they really do well with figuring out how to do the job that they need to do and can be some of the best employees out there.

So definitely a note to everyone who was looking to hire. Please look to this community to recruit and hire, and include us in your conversations.

We have our own expertise and definitely our members have expertise they can share with you to help you figure out a program for hiring people with disabilities.

And I just wanted to reference the Department of Labor's National Disability Employment Awareness Month briefing that occurred last week. It was streamed live but you can go to their website, go to DOL dot gov and you can find it right there on the homepage.

Really informative with assistant secretary Tara McKenzie talking with the secretary of labor. So please check that out.

And thank you so much everyone, and Alicia, did you want to say anything else is we close this out?

>> ALICIA EPSTEIN: Really just a quick wrap up, I just want to thank everyone for joining us this afternoon to hear two wonderful panelists to talk about the quality information and resources that are needed for 14C transition and also reasonable accommodations especially during the pandemic.

So I just want to thank everyone for taking time to join us this afternoon and I am really thrilled to have CCD sponsor this event. Feel free to reach out to any of us for any follow-up thoughts or any additional information you need.

Thank you and have a great rest of your day. Goodbye everyone.