



*For people with intellectual
and developmental disabilities*

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The Honorable John Kline, Chairman
Education and the Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller, Ranking Member
Education and the Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Miller:

I am writing to express our concerns about the Workforce Investment Improvement Act, H.R. 4297, and how the policies it creates could negatively affect jobseekers with disabilities, including jobseekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The Arc of the United States (The Arc) is the largest national community-based organization advocating for and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. We have more than 140,000 members and more than 700 state and local chapters nationwide.

The Arc strongly supports efforts to increase the employment of people with disabilities. Unfortunately, the vast majority of people with disabilities are unemployed or underemployed; in fact, people with disabilities represent the segment of our society that is least employed. As of March, 2012 only 17 percent of people with disabilities age 16 and older were employed, compared with 64 percent of people with no disability.¹

The Arc's own research suggests that the employment picture for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities may be even bleaker. In 2010, The Arc conducted a national online survey, called the FINDS Survey, to obtain perceptions of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families on a range of life-span issues. Over 5,000 people participated in the survey. Only 15% of FINDS survey respondents reported that their family member with an intellectual and/or developmental disability was employed.

To help increase opportunities for employment among people with disabilities, The Arc believes that reauthorizing the Rehabilitation Act and the Workforce Investment Act should be a priority. We appreciate

¹ Table A-6. Employment status of the civilian population by sex, age, and disability status, not seasonally adjusted. In U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012). The Employment Situation – March 2012. Accessed April 6, 2012 at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>.

Achieve with us.

your leadership in seeking reauthorization, and support several provisions in H.R. 4297 including the increased focus on transition of youth with disabilities from school to work. However, we have serious concerns with H.R. 4297, and cannot support the bill overall. Our concerns include the issues discussed below.

Foremost, The Arc is concerned that the bill would allow states to consolidate programs authorized under the Rehabilitation Act into the proposed Workforce Investment Fund. Given the shockingly low employment of people with disabilities, states should be required to maintain dedicated employment programs for people with significant disabilities. We are concerned that consolidation of vocational rehabilitation and related programs would divert resources, focus, and accountability away from assisting individuals who are most in need of these services.

Additionally, we are concerned that under the bill's mandatory consolidation of 27 programs, states would have fewer incentives to serve people who may require more time and supports to find work, including people with significant disabilities. Already, people with disabilities often encounter barriers in trying to access services at WIA One Stop Centers and other programs. We fear that consolidation of WIA programs would be likely to exacerbate these barriers. We are also concerned that many of these 27 programs have unique goals and objectives, and fear that much of the emphases contained in programs will be lost or diminished under consolidation.

Finally, The Arc opposes the proposal to consolidate the State Supported Employment Services Programs and Projects with Industry into the existing VR State Grants program. These programs focus on expanding employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities, and should be maintained.

In closing, we urge Congress to carefully consider proposed changes to ensure jobseekers with disabilities continue to have timely access to vocational rehabilitation, job training, and supported employment services and supports. Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Marty Ford
Director, Public Policy Office