



April 16, 2012

The Honorable John Kline
Chair
Education and the Workforce Committee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
Education and the Workforce Committee
2010 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Miller:

On behalf of the **Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Employment and Training Task Force**, we are writing to urge the House Committee on Education and the Workforce to address the chronically low labor participation rate of people with disabilities, including veterans with disabilities in the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act. CCD is a coalition of over 100 national disability rights, advocacy and provider organizations that advocates on behalf of the 54 million people with disabilities and their families.

Bureau of Labor Statistics data paint an ongoing grim portrait of workforce participation by people with disabilities. Statistics just released in March indicate that the workforce participation rate for people with disabilities remained virtually unchanged from 2010 to 2012 at roughly 21 percent. For those with no disability, the rate was 70 percent.

As the Committee begins to move forward with its legislation to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act, the **CCD Employment and Training Task Force has some concerns regarding the following provisions outlined in HR 4297**, The Workforce Investment Improvement Act of 2012:

- This legislation appears to be a response to the GAO report that identified 47 job training programs throughout the federal government. We believe that many Members of Congress have erroneously inferred from the report that these represent duplicative, redundant programs without fully examining the objectives of those programs or the populations they are intended to serve.

The legislation consolidates 27 programs into what are described as “four flexible funds”— a Workforce Investment Fund providing job training services to adults, youth, unemployed workers; a State Youth Workforce Investment Fund focused on disadvantaged youth to encourage school completion; a Veterans Workforce Investment Fund for employment services to veterans; and a Targeted Populations Workforce Investment Fund to assist ex-offenders, refugees, migrant and seasonal farm workers and Native Americans. We are concerned that much of the emphases contained in the original 27 program will be lost or suffer from diminished resources.

- While it appears that an effort was made to strengthen some requirements with state workforce plans [which a Governor must submit to Department of Labor to obtain funding under the Act] to directly address the employment training and job placement needs of people with disabilities, it

is unclear how those individuals with the most significant disabilities would fare under such a system.

- It is particularly troubling that the bill consolidates Title VI of the Rehabilitation Act. This includes the Supported Employment program created expressly for those with the most severe disabilities who often face the greatest challenges in obtaining and retaining employment. Too often, under broad, generic job training programs, those who are hardest to serve become casualties of the performance measurement system. Title VI also includes authorization of the Projects with Industry program which actively involves business in rehabilitation programs providing training and placement services for good competitive jobs in the community. Thus by repealing Title VI and rolling supported employment into Title 1 that requires a 21.3% state match, services to individuals needing supported employment will be severely limited as significant numbers of states are already unable to provide the state match to capture all federal funding available to them. Adding additional federal funds to require state match will further reduce service and supports available to individuals with the most significant disabilities who require these services to go to work.
- The bill repeals the In-Service Training of Rehabilitation Personnel and Recreational Programs. These programs provide essential training for rehabilitation personnel to ensure that people with disabilities receive the support they need in the vocational rehabilitation system.
- The bill also contains provisions from earlier measure (HR 3610) that would eliminate state plan provisions in current law that only requires “an assurance that veterans will be afforded the employment and training activities by the State to the extent practicable” by striking “to the extent practicable” and inserting “in accordance with the Jobs for Veterans Act” (JVA). Presumably, this is intended to draw the attention of state plan developers to the requirements of the JVA, which, in and of itself, is a useful step.
- It appears that funds in the newly consolidated Veterans Workforce Investment fund would be used to hire “one or more local veterans employment representatives to carry out employment, training, and placement services”. Local workforce areas would be required to give preference in hiring to service disabled veterans, veterans or if none of the above are available to anyone with expertise in serving veterans. These staff would be “administratively responsible” to the director of the one stop center.
- In addition to repealing the Disabled Veterans Outreach Programs (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) programs, HR 4297 also appear to include troubling provisions from an earlier measure (HR 3610) that would repeal the Veterans Workforce Investment Program included in the Workforce Investment Act, the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) as well as employment and job training assistance under Section 1144 of Title 10. Again, the underlying assumption of these repeals seems to be that these are duplicative and redundant programs identified by the GAO report and thus can be dealt with under the four consolidated workforce investment funds. However, we would highlight the fact that the HVRP is perhaps the most cost-effective, cost-efficient program in the federal government. Every year the HVRP is funded well-below its authorized level, and yet, its outcomes reflect great success in serving homeless veterans.

HR 4297 takes a broad swipe at consolidating programs appearing to be “unnecessary and duplicative.” Unfortunately, the bill flatly ignores the fact that many of these programs are the best option available for veterans and people with disabilities. We are concerned that *there is no specific fund dedicated to people with disabilities and, additionally, that many of the special emphases contained in existing programs will be lost or suffer from diminished resources.*

We appreciate the desire of the Committee to put forward a plan to get Americans back to work and to address this nation's long term structural unemployment challenges. However, success can only be obtained through inclusion of people with disabilities in its solutions or and through bolstering the programs that are essential to helping people with disabilities obtain or regain employment. We urge you to review our Workforce Investment Act principles for additional recommendations.

Sincerely,

Alicia Epstein, NISH
Co-chair

Susan Goodman, National Down Syndrome Congress
Co-chair

Charlie Harles,
International Association of Business, Industry & Rehabilitation
Co-chair

Susan Prokop,
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Co-chair

Enclosure: CCD Employment and Training Task Force Workforce Investment Act Principles

