



June 4, 2012

Representative George Miller
Ranking Member, House Committee on Education and the Workforce
2205 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: The Workforce Investment Act of 2012 (H.R. 4227)

Dear Representative Miller:

As the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy System and Client Assistance Programs for people with disabilities, the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) would like to express its strong support for H.R. 4227, the Workforce Investment Act of 2012. Because of the critical need to provide quality jobs for people with disabilities, NDRN appreciates the provisions in this bill to advance efforts to find employment for people with disabilities and affirm the government's role in reducing the high unemployment rate and encouraging greater participation of people with disabilities in the workforce.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the current unemployment rate for people with disabilities is around 15%, nearly twice that of the general population. The unemployment rate would be even higher, but for the fact that many people with disabilities have resigned themselves to not being able to find employment. The current participation rate for people with disabilities is approximately 20%, while the participation rate in the general population is about 65%. H.R. 4227 reauthorizes and continues key policies and programs that assist people with disabilities to find employment. It also establishes new programs that would help people with disabilities find competitive, integrated employment.

As an example, H.R. 4227 requires States to ensure that vocational rehabilitation programs provide pre-employment transition services for all students with disabilities who are in need of such services. The Protection and Advocacy and Client Assistance Program network has encountered many children who have not been provided these transition services in a timely fashion by the time they graduate, and as a result were not prepared to enter the workforce or higher education. Mandating the provision of these transition services will help people with disabilities confront the many challenges that are involved in finding competitive integrated employment or going to college. By engaging vocational rehabilitation programs before youth transition out of school, H.R. 4227 would help ensure that all youth with disabilities have appropriate plans in place to allow them to successfully transition into the workplace or higher education.

NDRN has helped shine a light on the unemployment problem for people with disabilities with two reports. The first, issued in January 2011 and called *Segregated & Exploited: A Call to Action!*, documented the risks of exploitation and abuse that come with segregated or subminimum wage settings, and discussed case studies of people with disabilities paid extremely low wages for years, with little review of the role that vocational rehabilitation agencies are intended to play in providing services for people to leave sheltered workshops or subminimum wage positions. This report is available at <http://www.ndrn.org/images/Documents/Resources/Publications/Reports/Segregated-and-Exploited.pdf>. The second, entitled *Beyond Segregated and Exploited: Update on the Employment of People with Disabilities*, discusses how federal funds are used to support the hiring of people with disabilities at subminimum wage, and makes a series of recommendations about how to phase out sheltered workshops and sub-minimum wage employment. Your legislation will help solve the problems exposed in these two reports and help people with disabilities become more fully integrated in our society by helping them find competitive, integrated employment.

NDRN thanks you for introducing H.R. 4227 and looks forward to working with you and the House Committee on Education and the Workforce to improve employment services for people with disabilities and support greater transition to competitive, integrated employment through enactment of this legislation. Taking these important steps will help with achieving the eventual goal of reducing unemployment of people with disabilities and increasing the participation of people with disabilities in the workforce.

Sincerely,



Curt Decker
Executive Director

cc: Representative John Kline
Representative Thomas E. Petri
Representative Howard P. McKeon
Representative Judy Biggert
Representative Todd Russell Platts
Representative Joe Wilson
Representative Virginia Foxx
Representative Bob Goodlatte
Representative Duncan Hunter
Representative David P. Roe
Representative Glenn Thompson
Representative Tim Walberg

Representative Scott DesJarlais
Representative Richard L. Hanna
Representative Todd Rokita
Representative Larry Bucshon
Representative Trey Gowdy
Representative Lou Barletta
Representative Kristi L. Noem
Representative Martha Roby
Representative Joseph J. Heck
Representative Dennis A. Ross
Representative Mike Kelly
Representative Dale E. Kildee
Representative Robert E. Andrews
Representative Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
Representative Lynn C. Woolsey
Representative Ruben Hinojosa
Representative Carolyn McCarthy
Representative John F. Tierney
Representative Dennis J. Kucinich
Representative Rush D. Holt
Representative Susan A. Davis
Representative Raul M. Grijalva
Representative Timothy H. Bishop
Representative David Loebsack
Representative Mazie Hirono
Representative Jason Altmire
Representative Marcia Fudge