



June 4, 2012

Representative Virginia Foxx  
1230 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

*Re: The Workforce Investment Improvement Act of 2012 (H.R. 4297)*

Dear Representative Foxx:

As the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy System and Client Assistance Programs (CAP) for people with disabilities, the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) writes today to express our opposition to H.R. 4297, the Workforce Investment Improvement Act of 2012. We are opposed specifically to a number of provisions in this bill that would consolidate or eliminate programs that assist people with disabilities in obtaining employment.

The P&A / CAP network have unfortunately found in their advocacy for people with disabilities around the country, the need for employment programs focused on the needs of people with disabilities is great. 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 unemployment. The current participation rate for people with disabilities is approximately 20%, less than one-third the participation rate of people without a disability.

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.

Specifically, NDRN opposes the proposal in H.R. 4297 to repeal, in its entirety, Title VI of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which authorizes the Projects with Industry program and supported employment programs.

Projects with Industry (PWI) is a unique program that engages with leaders in business and industry to establish Business Advisory Councils that work with employers to create opportunities for people with disabilities. PWI helps to establish job development, job placement and career advancement services for people with disabilities, as well as training in “realistic work settings” to prepare people with disabilities for employment in realistic day-to-day settings, and provides support services necessary to help people with disabilities maintain the employment and career advancement they have gained. This program considers every step of the job application, advancement and retention process and enables people with disabilities to have services to help them proceed through every step. Perhaps most importantly, PWI takes a collaborative approach toward working with business leaders in order to find the solutions that work best for both employers and employees.

NDRN is also opposed to the elimination of supported employment programs for people with disabilities. Supported employment is often a critical avenue for people with disabilities to enter the workforce. It builds supports around the person, so that people with more severe disabilities, who may have faced difficulty entering the workforce, have the opportunity to work. Title VI requires that each state develop a State Plan to provide supported employment services to people with disabilities. Eliminating this program would be a setback in efforts to end unemployment for people with disabilities.

NDRN stands ready to work with your office and with the House Committee on Education and the Workforce to help improve employment services for people with disabilities and support greater transition to competitive, integrated employment, which will reduce unemployment of people with disabilities and increase the participation of people with disabilities in the workforce, ultimately a benefit for the entire country.

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 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 George Miller  
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