



February 14, 2013

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 2013*

Dear Representative Miller:

As the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems and Client Assistance Programs (CAP) for people with disabilities, the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) would like to thank you for introducing the Workforce Investment Act of 2013. Because of the critical need to provide competitive wage and integrated jobs for people with disabilities, NDRN appreciates the provisions in this bill to advance efforts for people with disabilities to find employment and affirm the government's role in reducing the high unemployment rate and encouraging greater participation of people with disabilities in the workforce.

NDRN and the P&A/CAP network have employment as a priority issue in our advocacy for people with disabilities. The ability to find employment is a critical part of community integration and independence for people with disabilities. The P&As and CAPs have been advocating to prevent discrimination against people with disabilities and to ensure that vocational rehabilitation programs and other employment supports have taken necessary steps to ensure that their clients are able to obtain, maintain and increase their employment.

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 in the workforce is approximately 20%, while the participation rate in the general population is about 65%. Your legislation 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.

For example, your bill 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. Unfortunately, many times, the P&A / CAP Network has encountered children who have not received 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, this legislation 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 and the P&A / CAP Network has helped shine a light on the employment 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*, (available at [http://www.ndrn.org/images/Documents/Resources/Publications/Reports/Beyond\\_Segregated\\_and\\_Exploited.pdf](http://www.ndrn.org/images/Documents/Resources/Publications/Reports/Beyond_Segregated_and_Exploited.pdf)) 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 some of 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 the Workforce Investment Act of 2013 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