

Support Youth with Significant Disabilities Get Equal Opportunities to Become Productive, Responsible, Contributing Citizens of Society in Adulthood

Cosponsor the Transitioning towards Excellence & Achievement in Mobility Legislation of 2011

Early intervention is critical to the future success of all youth in preparation for adulthood, including individuals with significant disabilities. Thus, **the discussion of transition and employment** should begin as early in an individual's life as possible. Evidence-based research has conclusively documented that youth with disabilities who were educated in inclusive settings, exposed to work experience and career exploration and participated in a paid work experience while in school had better post-secondary and employment outcomes.¹

Despite the public funding going into the provision of employment services for individuals with disabilities requiring significant supports, the participation rate of persons with disabilities in employment remains low. The employment rate drops significantly for persons with more severe conditions. Four out of five persons with significant disabilities are not considered part of the labor force.² Only one in ten individuals with mental disabilities receiving Social Security Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments are considered to be in the workforce.³ While data specifically focused on employment trends in the significantly disabled is limited, we do know that state mental retardation/developmental disability (MR/DD) agencies provided day and employment supports to roughly 460,000 people in 2001.⁴ Among these individuals, approximately 23% of individuals supported by MR/DD agencies nationwide were employed in integrated employment settings, with individual state outcomes ranging from 2% to 56%.⁵ These numbers have remained stagnant for the past seven years.⁶

When state education, vocational rehabilitation, workforce development, Medicaid, and other public agencies work closely together early to support and promote the growth and development of youth with significant disabilities, individuals benefit from the synergistic coordination of supports and are able to achieve better outcomes. To ensure effective coordination among these entities, it is critical that systemic changes allow for flexible braiding of resources, coupled with a collective presumption that publicly-financed supports should focus on and prioritize the attainment of outcomes associated with post-secondary education, integrated employment, and economic advancement of individuals with significant disabilities.

To address several of these systemic barriers and better promote the advancement of Americans with significant disabilities transitioning from youth to adulthood, a trio of bills called the Transitioning towards Excellence in Achievement and Mobility (TEAM) legislation was introduced in February of 2011. Each of the three bills, the TEAM-Education Act, TEAM-Employment Act, and TEAM-Empowerment Act, would strengthen accountability, clarify expectations, expand flexibility and align systems to ensure that publically-funded assistance is effectively utilized to support one uniform goal -- ensuring that every youth with a significant disability has the opportunity, encouragement and support to become gainfully employed in an integrated setting, pursue a post-secondary education, and contribute to and engage in meaningful ways in typical community settings once they leave high school.

- The **TEAM-Education Act** (H.R. 602) would amend the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act by requiring transition components to be included in Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for all IDEA-eligible students at the age of 14, expands the definition of transition services to include customized employment strategies and self-determination activities, and clarifies that Local Education Authorities can use discretionary dollars to bring in transition expertise or contract out transition services.
- The **TEAM-Empowerment Act** (H.R. 603) would amend the Developmental Disabilities Act to establish Transition Planning and Service Divisions within the State Developmental Disability Authorities, as well as Individual Transition Plans to advance best outcomes and self-determination. Additionally the bill would increase accountability of these authorities by providing the Secretary of DHHS through the Commissioner of the Administration on developmental Disabilities (ADD) the authority to disburse assistance to states which agree to participate.
- The **TEAM-Employment Act** (H.R. 604) would amend the Rehabilitation Act to realign preferred outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities, and streamlines public funding by requiring the VR systems to actively engage with other state entities. Additionally, the bill would promote innovation and accountability through demonstration grants aimed at implementing reform strategies.

For more information on the TEAM legislation, please contact Scot Malvaney at scot.malvaney@mail.house.gov or 202-225-5031.

¹ Cimeria, R. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 2008.

² American Community Survey, 2008.

³ National Disability Institute, 2009. www.reitour.org.

⁴ Institute for Community Inclusion, 2008.

⁵ Institute for Community Inclusion, 2008

⁶ Institute for Community Inclusion, 2008.