

# Collaboration to Promote Self-Determination

November 5, 2009

U.S. Senator Tom Harkin  
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP)  
United States Senate  
SD-428 Dirksen Senate Office Building (Committee Staff)  
SH-731 Hart Senate Office Building (Personal Office/Staff)  
Washington, DC 20510  
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Dear Senator Harkin:

As national organizations focused on improving the lives of citizens with significant disabilities, we want to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued leadership on behalf of the more than 54 million Americans currently living with a disability, including millions of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The Collaboration to Promote Self Determination (CPSD) seeks innovative public policy reform to promote employment first policies, effective transition strategies, meaningful asset development, and strong long-term supports and services for citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We are writing to express our interest in working with you and your staff on the development, introduction and passage of comprehensive, landmark legislation to change systems and create the infrastructure necessary to support meaningful employment opportunities for individuals living with significant disabilities.

We share your enthusiasm to ensure that all citizens living with significant disabilities have a plethora of opportunity to seek and gain meaningful employment in an integrated setting. Additionally, we support the introduction of greater enforcement measures to prevent abuse of existing federal law and ensure greater protections for citizens with significant disabilities.

In order to avoid the unintended consequence of discouraging and diminishing the hiring of people with significant disabilities, we urge policymakers to think and act holistically about the complex intricacies of current policy barriers, reimbursement structures and operational practices of service delivery systems that impede the ability of citizens with significant disabilities from gaining meaningful employment.

There is great innovation among some states to promote meaningful employment of people with significant disabilities, and any federal legislative proposals should incorporate support for expanding promising practices that are currently being illustrated by these states. These state case-studies demonstrate that given the right incentives and conditions, states can significantly improve employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities. While modifications of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) are needed, it will not alone address the employment needs of citizens



with significant cognitive, intellectual and developmental disabilities who too often are restricted to limited choice and impoverishment.

We encourage that at a minimum, any new legislation to address the abysmal employment rates of citizens with significant disabilities include a national pilot initiative focused on the promotion of youth with significant disabilities into integrated, supported employment settings paid at minimum wages or higher. Such a demonstration could encourage states to focus on implementing and documenting promising practices aimed at effectively integrating youth with significant disabilities into the generic workforce and economic mainstream.

For your review, we are attaching a copy of our guiding principles that provide the foundation for CPD's more comprehensive policy framework, which is focused on creating a holistic federal infrastructure to support the employment of people with significant disabilities through the promotion of Employment First policies across the country.

Thank you again for your leadership and consideration of our proposals. Citizens with complex intellectual, cognitive and developmental disabilities deserve more in the way of opportunity to live a productive, economically self-sufficient, fulfilling life in an integrated communal setting, and we as a country can do better to help support this vision. We look forward to working with you and your staff in the months and years ahead to develop the comprehensive, holistic policy reforms necessary to create a system of supports that we can all be proud of.

Sincerely,

Association of Persons in Supported Employment (APSE)

American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR)

Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)

Autism Society

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD)

National Association of State Directors on Developmental Disabilities and Services (NASDDDS)

National Down Syndrome Congress

National Down Syndrome Society

National Fragile X Foundation

TASH

The Arc of the United States

United Cerebral Palsy

