

Promote the Advancement of Youth with Significant Disabilities to Become Productive, Contributing Citizens of Society in Adulthood

Cosponsor the Transitioning towards Excellence & Achievement in Mobility through Employment (TEAM-Employment) Act of 2011

POLICY OVERVIEW

Citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience a 90% unemployment rate, many times higher than their non-disabled peers. Yet the systems designed to assist Americans in becoming prepared for and finding work often fail to meaningfully serve citizens with significant disabilities. The intrinsic value and pride which accompanies integrated work, as well as the right to earn minimum wages or higher, should be available to all citizens regardless of disability status. Further, research demonstrates that when provided the right supports and opportunities, individuals with significant disabilities are capable of successfully working in their communities, and as a result of this work have better long-term health outcomes and rely less on publicly-financed entitlements over time.

PURPOSE OF THE TEAM LEGISLATION

The TEAM legislation provides three separate legislative responses to better align existing federal programs providing publically-funded systems and supports to focus on 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-EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 2011: BILL SUMMARY

The TEAM-Employment Act of 2011 (H.R. 604) amends the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to establish firmer accountability for systems charged with providing citizens with significant disabilities job training and support through state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to ensure that the expected outcome for all individuals with significant disabilities receiving VR is economic advancement through pursuance of post-secondary education or integrated employment at minimum wage or higher. The legislation seeks to achieve these reforms by:

- ❖ **Realigning Desired Outcomes of Publicly-Financed VR Supports toward Post Secondary Education & Integrated Employment:** This bill institutes the attainment of integrated employment or post-secondary education as the preferred outcome for all individuals including those with significant disabilities. In furtherance of this realignment of funding focus, VR programs are directed to strive toward ensuring that all individuals with disabilities to be employed in integrated settings at the greater of minimum or competitive wages with commensurate benefits, and pursue independent living and community participation. VR agencies will no longer be able to determine adults with significant disabilities as being ineligible to receive supported employment services.
- ❖ **Ensuring Flexibility for Individualizing and Targeting Supports:** The legislation requires a presumption of employability for all individuals including those with the most significant disabilities and provides more flexible means for individuals to access and utilize services to assist them in achieving and sustaining long-term integrated employment at minimum wage or higher.

- ❖ **Promoting Systems Change through State Innovation & Performance Accountability:** The bill authorizes demonstration grants to allow ten states annually to implement reform strategies across multiple state systems through the implementation of Employment First strategies focused on the improvement of post-secondary education and integrated employment outcomes for young adults with significant disabilities. State grantees would be required to rigorously collect comprehensive data on individual outcomes and would be held accountable under strict evaluation plans. Funds from these grants would be prohibited from being used for activities that result in the placement of participants into facility-based segregated services.

POLICY RATIONALE

The TEAM-Employment Act (H.R. 604) requires VR systems to actively engage with other state entities to meaningfully serve citizens with significant disabilities under the presumption that all citizens with significant disabilities can work in integrated settings at competitive wages. The legislation ensures that public funds are being streamlined and utilized to assist individuals with significant disabilities toward optimizing self-sufficiency and promoting economic advancement.. In conjunction with this accountability, increased flexibility of funding streams and supports will amplify the opportunities for citizens with significant disabilities to optimize self-sufficiency through focusing on services that result in integrated employment, post-secondary education, economic advancement, independent living, and meaningful community & civic engagement. Further, the pilot program will establish best practices in achieving these outcomes for citizens with significant disabilities that can be brought to scale to effectuate national systems reform and a more efficient use of federal resources..

ACTION REQUIRED

Congressional leaders dedicated to improving the future opportunities and economic advancement of youth with significant disabilities are encouraged to co-sponsor all three of the following legislative proposals: TEAM-Education Act of 2011; Team-Empowerment Act of 2011; and TEAM-Employment Act of 2011. ***To cosponsor one or more of these innovative legislative bills, please contact Scot Malvaney in the Office of U.S. Representative Gregg Harper (R-MS) at Scot.Malvaney@mail.house.gov or 202-225-5031.***