

SUPPORT YOUTH WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES TO BECOME PRODUCTIVE, RESPONSIBLE, CONTRIBUTING CITIZENS OF SOCIETY IN ADULTHOOD

*Cosponsor the Transitioning toward Excellence & Achievement in Mobility through Empowerment
(TEAM-Empowerment) Act of 2011*

Policy Overview

73% of the \$33.5 billion in annual Home & Community Based Waiver funds provided to state Medicaid programs every year are aimed at supporting individuals with complex intellectual and developmental disabilities to become meaningfully engaged in the community. Despite the federal government's significant investment in the goal of transitioning citizens with the most significant disabilities into community settings living productive, meaningful lives, however, thousands of young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities continue to be placed in segregated settings, including sheltered workshops making subminimum wages, segregated day habilitation programs and segregated residential living facilities. These outcomes are in direct conflict with the intent of the Home & Community Based Services waiver initiative.

State Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities Agencies (State I/DD agencies) are responsible for managing the waiver funding bestowed to state Medicaid agencies to support citizens with the most significant disabilities, yet they lack the direction, guidance, support and infrastructure required to transform into systems that utilize these funds as they were intended – to get citizens with significant disabilities into the community through integrated employment, civic engagement, and independent living.

Purpose of the TEAM Legislation

The TEAM legislation provides three separate legislative responses to better align existing federal programs providing publicly-financed 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.

Description of the TEAM-Empowerment Act of 2011

The TEAM-Empowerment Act of 2011 (H.R. 603) amends the Developmental Disabilities Bill of Rights Act of 2000 to establish greater accountability of the DD System through the enhancement of existing infrastructure to support youth with significant disabilities transitioning into adulthood to ensure that any publicly-financed supports are aimed at successfully transitioning youth into adulthood through integrated employment, post-secondary education, economic advancement, independent living, and meaningful community & civic engagement.

- ❖ **Establishes of Transition Planning & Service Divisions within State I/DD Authorities:** The bill establishes a Transition Planning and Services Division within each State I/DD agency to provide the capacity and expertise required to successfully transition youth with significant disabilities from high school into meaningful community engagement and integrated employment. This division will assist with the development of individual transition plans (ITPs) and provide Transition Brokers to help individuals and families navigate various systems of complex supports to ensure better coordination and efficient use of resources.

- ❖ **Creates of Individualized Transition Plans to Better Focus Resources toward Helping Citizens Meaningfully Engage in the Community through Post-Secondary Education & Employment:** Creates individualized transition plans (ITPs) for youth with significant disabilities once they exit high school until age 26, to ensure a seamless transition from high school into the I/DD system and to ensure that funds provided to support individuals with significant disabilities are aimed at promoting integrated employment, post-secondary education, economic advancement and community engagement through optimal self-sufficiency. ITPs will address the needs of the individual including career planning, development and leadership, connecting (community) activities, and family involvement, as well as economic self-sufficiency.
- ❖ **Advances Self-Determination & Optimal Self-Sufficiency among Citizens with Significant Disabilities:** The division will also provide training regarding self-advocacy, self-determination, and peer mentoring for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. This includes providing individuals and their families with accurate and understandable information about federal and state supports, services, and programs, including educational resources about insurance and benefits programs, savings tools, and asset or income limits that may affect State and Federal means-tested programs.
- ❖ **Promotes Greater Coordination among All State Agencies Providing Publicly-Financed Supports to Citizens with Significant Disabilities:** Additionally, participating State DD Agencies will facilitate a Memorandum of Understanding between key State agencies involved in the provision of services to individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to foster effective multiagency collaboration. The intent of the MOU is to streamline services and programs, promote efficiencies and establish a uniform focus on better outcomes related to optimal self-sufficiency and advancement of citizens with significant disabilities.
- ❖ **Ensures Greater Accountability among State I/DD Authorities:** The bill ensures greater accountability of the state I/DD agencies 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 bill provides \$50,000,000 in funding for fiscal year 2012 and each subsequent fiscal year.

POLICY RATIONALE

The TEAM-Empowerment Act (H.R. 603) establishes greater accountability of the I/DD service delivery system of publicly-financed supports by developing a synergistic interconnectivity between state educational agencies and state I/DD authorities to successfully transition youth with significant disabilities from high school into meaningful employment and post-secondary education opportunities. Additionally, the legislation ensures that publicly-financed supports are focused on helping youth with significant disabilities successfully transition into adulthood and meaningfully optimize self-sufficiency through services that result in integrated employment, post-secondary education, economic advancement, independent living, and meaningful community & civic engagement.

ACTION REQUIRED

Members of Congress dedicated to improving the future opportunities and quality of life 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.***