



February 21, 2014

Senator Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Chuck Grassley
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Wyden and Senator Grassley:

On behalf of the Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst (APSE), the only national organization with an *exclusive focus* on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities, we are writing to thank you for your announcement to introduce a bill that will incentivize states to fund integrated employment and to express our strong support and endorsement of this important legislation.

We strongly believe that your intention to re-introduce the legislation entitled *Transition to Independence: Medicaid Demonstration* would be a catalyst to incentivize more states to move people with disabilities out of sheltered workshops and facility-based habilitation programs, and into integrated employment. We believe that this proposed legislation would greatly help to advance integrated employment and increase self-sufficiency for citizens with disabilities. We particularly like the bonus payments to states for reducing the number of people with disabilities in sheltered employment and establishing interagency collaboration. We feel that providing incentives versus penalizing states is a beneficial approach.

As you know, there is a current national trend to move away from sheltered employment services guided by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Department of Justice. In particular, the use of Medicaid waivers for prevocational services to be used to assist people in finding integrated, community-based employment sends a strong message that we need everyone in our communities to be part of the economic fabric. We are extremely pleased to see that states like Oregon, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New York have proactively followed suit by closing down new entrants to sheltered workshop services following the guidance from CMS and the Department of Justice.

We share your enthusiasm to ensure that all individuals living with disabilities should have a broad range of opportunities to seek and gain competitive, integrated employment opportunities. By sponsoring such legislation we can continue the mission of Employment First: that employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of level of disability.

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On behalf of APSE, a 3,000 plus national membership organization focused on advancing employment and economic well-being for individuals with disabilities, we would like to applaud your announcement to introduce this critical legislation and we look forward to supporting you in your future efforts.

Sincerely,

Laura A. Owens, Ph.D
Executive Director

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Public Policy Associate