

### **Senate Hearing Highlights Major Barriers to Economic Self-Sufficiency for People with Disabilities**

WASHINGTON, DC (September 18, 2014) — The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) applauds Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA), Ranking Member Lamar Alexander (R-TN), and other Senate HELP Committee Members for holding a [hearing](#) today on overcoming persistent barriers to economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities.

“Today’s hearing shined a spotlight on some of the central challenges in disability policy that will be important to address in the coming years,” said Andrew Imparato, AUCD Executive Director and former disability policy director for Chairman Harkin. “We need to create real pathways to competitive, integrated employment and economic well-being for the more than 50 million Americans with disabilities so that they don’t have a 28 percent poverty rate,” he added.

People with disabilities continue to be among the poorest of the poor. According to a new report, [Fulfilling the Promise](#), researched and written by majority staff of the HELP committee, living with a disability in American can be both economically and socially costly. In fact, twice as many Americans with disabilities live in poverty compared to those without disabilities; and many people with disabilities fear that earning or saving too much money could cause them to lose access to supports they need to live independently in the community.

Most people with disabilities want to work but they face many obstacles, including persistent low expectations and discrimination, as well as barriers in our public system that is intended to provide supports and services. According the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), only 17.6 percent of people with disabilities were employed in 2013 compared to 64 percent of those without disabilities. Even those that manage to find work face significant gaps in pay and compensation. AUCD has joined Chairman Harkin and five other national organizations to launch the 6 by ’15 campaign ([www.sixbyfifteen.org](http://www.sixbyfifteen.org)), which sets a goal to grow the size of the disability labor force by more than one million workers by the end of next year.

AUCD has been advocating for changes to public policies that increase competitive, integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities. AUCD applauds the Congress and the Administration for its recent efforts to change policies to improve the economic self-sufficiency of people with disabilities. These include the enactment of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) with its strong emphasis on providing more training and other supports and services for youth

with disabilities transitioning from school to work or postsecondary education. The Department of Justice has also been actively working to enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Supreme Court *Olmstead* decision. The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission has been equally proactive in updating its regulations related to disability employment discrimination.

However, more can and should be done to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as those without disabilities. AUCD urges Congress to begin these reforms by passing the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, AGE-IN Act, reauthorizing the Higher Education Act and Elementary and Secondary Education Act with more focus on training teachers and supporting students, raising resource and asset limits in income security programs, and making Social Security work incentives more effective and user-friendly. AUCD is ready to provide the evidence-based knowledge to assist policymakers as they make these and other important reforms.

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) represents over 120 University Centers nationwide that conduct basic and applied research, develop evidence-based supports and best practices, train professionals that support people with disabilities, build leaders, and provide technical assistance to communities, providers and the public. The members of AUCD represent every U.S. state and territory. For more information and a directory of member Centers, visit AUCD's website: [www.aucd.org](http://www.aucd.org).