

January 14, 2014

U.S. Senator Tom Harkin Chairman
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor &
Pensions (HELP)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor &
Pensions (HELP)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Patty Murray
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor &
Pensions (HELP)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
Dear Senators Harkin, Alexander, Murray, Isakson,

U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson
Senate Committee on Health, Education Labor &
Pensions (HELP)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Thank you for working in a bipartisan fashion to reauthorize and strengthen the Workforce Investment Act (WIA, S. 1356). The undersigned organizations representing millions of children, youth and adults with developmental and other disabilities strongly support passage of S. 1356, including Section 511 of Title V of the Rehabilitation Act.

The intent of Section 511 is to encourage and support individuals to secure competitive, integrated employment and to close the door for youth with disabilities from being automatically transitioned from school into subminimum wage jobs in non-integrated settings. Section 511 does this by authorizing many more training and supports for individuals to achieve competitive integrated employment and by reforming the current system so that individuals are presumed eligible for services.

While our organizations would like to see legislation that phases out the use of subminimum wage over time (in conjunction with systems change and additional training and supports), we realize there is no consensus to eliminate the subminimum wage program at this time. We feel that section 511, in the context of the larger bill, makes significant improvements to providing opportunities for competitive, integrated work, especially for young people leaving school and finding their first jobs.

We are especially in agreement that the policy expressed in the bill presumes that an individual with a significant disability is eligible for and can benefit from VR services and requires that an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) have a goal of competitive integrated employment. We also strongly support the activities to improve the transition of youth with disabilities from school to post-secondary education or competitive integrated employment and the grants to assist States in developing programs to provide supported employment services for youth to achieve an employment outcome of competitive integrated employment.

S. 1356 makes critically needed improvements so that our workforce system addresses unemployment and underemployment for people with and without disabilities. We urge your continued efforts to bring the bill to the floor and our organizations look forward to helping you pass this important legislation.

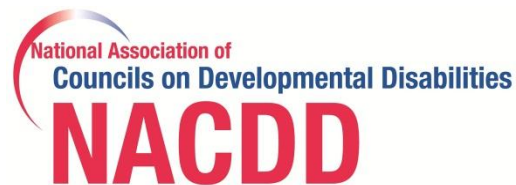
Sincerely,



Andrew Imparato
Executive Director



Esme' Grant
Director of Public Policy



Curt Decker
Executive Director

