



U.S. AbilityOne Commission Briefing to the Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities

**Tina Ballard, Executive Director
October 15, 2015**





AbilityOne Program Facts

- Employed more than 45,000 Americans who are blind or who have significant disabilities in FY 2014
- Enabling Act passed 1938, updated 1971
- Program uses a Public-Private Structure (statutory)
 - U.S. AbilityOne Commission has Federal oversight
- AbilityOne jobs in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and Guam
- Average hourly wage \$12.41 in FY 2014





Areas of Agreement

The Commission's Quality Work Environment (QWE) Initiative is well aligned with many public policy concepts identified in the Advisory Committee's draft report.

The Commission's QWE Guiding Principles state:

People who are blind or significantly disabled should have...

- Opportunities to do the work of their choice with appropriate supports and/or workplace flexibilities, alongside non-disabled employees where all workers receive competitive wages and benefits, either with their current employer or other community-based businesses;...





Areas of Agreement

The Commission's QWE Guiding Principles state:

People who are blind or significantly disabled should have...

- Ongoing training opportunities that make employment with other community-based businesses possible, by teaching job skills and social skills, as well as promoting the worker's leadership and management potential
- A clear path to career advancement opportunities, which details what opportunities are available and the steps the worker must accomplish to achieve promotion in a reasonable time period





Areas of Agreement

Other areas of agreement between the Commission and the Advisory Committee's Draft Report:

- Increasing integration through a lower direct labor hour ratio for the AbilityOne Program
(Requires statutory change)
- Enhancing accountability through establishment of an Office of Inspector General for the Program
(Requires statutory change)





Differing Perspectives

The Commission has a different perspective on several issues discussed in Advisory Committee's Draft Report and in Advisory Committee public meetings:

- The AbilityOne Program provides REAL jobs
 - Progressive positions in careers such as IT support, contract administration and mechanical maintenance
- AbilityOne sales of products and services are not funds available to other employment programs
- AbilityOne nonprofit agencies make thousands of placements into competitive and supported employment





Placements

Fiscal Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
AbilityOne Competitive Placements	1,889	1,396	1,370	1,428	1,276
AbilityOne Supported Placements	1,001	687	775	790	660
Non-AbilityOne Competitive Placements	4,023	4,306	3,864	4,362	3,141
Non-AbilityOne Supported Placements	2,889	2,831	2,820	2,992	3,274
Direct Competitive Placements	8,571	9,155	8,446	9,265	8,923
Direct Supported Placements	5,162	5,589	5,657	5,649	6,339
Total – All Placements (Competitive and Supported)	22,834	23,964	22,935	24,486	23,613





Summary: Over the Past Five Years

- AbilityOne NPAs:
 - Placed nearly 118,000 people on competitive jobs
 - Paid nearly \$5B to those workers in wages
 - Paid \$2.76B to AbilityOne employees
 - Includes more than 5,400 promotions to higher paying and/or supervisory positions
 - In total, paid nearly \$10B in wages and benefits to people placed and to people employed on AbilityOne jobs





Differing Perspectives

The Commission has a different perspective on several issues discussed in Advisory Committee's Draft Report and in Advisory Committee public meetings:

- To accurately represent AbilityOne wages, the report should include the middle and higher end of the range:
 - On average, more than 85% earn at least \$10.10/hour
 - Some employees with significant disabilities earn annual salaries of \$30K - \$75K
- Increasing competitive integrated employment does not require eliminating current AbilityOne employment; we support people having more choices, not fewer





Opportunities

The U.S. AbilityOne Commission and Advisory Committee are both charged with increasing employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

We can find common ground, and propose to:

- “Do No Harm” to those already employed, while working to enhance the quality of their employment
- Work together to identify opportunities to modernize the AbilityOne Program

