



*For people with intellectual
and developmental disabilities*

**Statement for the Record
Submitted by**

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to the

**Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with
Disabilities
April 27 2016 Public Meeting**

The Arc of the United States appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony to the committee and values the work and engagement of the committee throughout the process of developing your recommendations and conclusions for the Secretary of Labor.

The Arc is the largest national community-based organization advocating for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families, with nearly 700 state and local chapters nationwide. The Arc believes that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities belong in the community and have fundamental moral, civil, and constitutional rights to be fully included and actively participate in all aspects of society, including employment.

The Arc's position statement concerning employment states in part:

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) can be employed in the community alongside people without disabilities and earn competitive wages. They should be supported to make informed choices about their work and careers and have the resources to seek, obtain, and be successful in community employment.

Barriers to employment include, first and foremost, low societal expectations that foster job discrimination. In addition, unrealistically low limits on assets and earnings make people fear losing vital public benefits if they work too many hours or earn too much. Systemically, public resources fund service hours rather than outcomes and are often neither sufficient nor flexible enough to allow collaboration and blending of employment funding streams. Lack of other services like transportation or of accommodations like assistive technology can also hinder success.

Unfortunately, the majority of adults with I/DD are unemployed or underemployed despite their ability, desire, and willingness to work in the community. Many individuals with I/DD have been placed in programs that are meant to be temporary and prepare individuals for employment, but individuals remain in those settings, often in environments where they are segregated from their non-disabled peers for years, instead of moving to community employment. In order to move the



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system to foster integrated employment, states and the federal government must focus on developing a thorough and comprehensive approach to addressing the barriers. The testimony will focus on three main issues, capacity building, transition, careers, and wages.

Capacity Building

Service providers require assistance in the form of information on best practices for transitioning their service structure, training, and financial resources (in order to transition.) The workforce of service providers will also need training about best practices in job development, approaches to employment, including supported and customized employment, and how best to support people in community jobs. There will also need to be investments in the system so that service providers and others working to assist individuals with I/DD to get jobs can better engage the private business sector.

In order to build capacity within the community, there also must be a true understanding of, and commitment to, community employment for all individuals, including those with the most severe disabilities, from government agencies. State and local Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offices and Workforce Centers will require more than legislation and a state plan to create a system that works for individuals with I/DD. The VR counselors and workforce center staff, who are the first points of contact for individuals with I/DD, their families, and often service providers, must be supported in a paradigm shift. Moving from focusing on numbers and closed cases, to presuming competence in every individual who comes through their doors, no matter their level of need, and taking the time to find the right jobs. This will require training and consistent reinforcement from the state and federal level.

Transition

Individuals with I/DD often leave school with little community-based vocational experience or planning for transition from school to work or post-secondary education. The Arc's position statement on employment includes the following recommendations for transition:

- Transition planning should start early.
- Transition activities should foster individualized exploration of and experiences with community-based employment options that enable youth to make informed choices.
- Transition activities should include career assessments to identify students' interests and preferences, exposure to post-secondary education and career opportunities, training to develop job-seeking and workplace skills, and participation in multiple on-the-job activities and experiences in paid and unpaid settings. Transition activities should not be limited to unpaid internships at pre-set community worksites.
- Students should leave high school with opportunities to pursue post-secondary education and/or with an appropriate job or an action plan for finding one.



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Careers and Wages

The focus of WIOA on transition-aged youth is important; however, better supports must be available for all individuals with I/DD to find jobs, and more importantly to develop careers. When individuals with I/DD are employed, few people have opportunities to advance, explore new possibilities, or, in their later years, retire. Individuals with I/DD deserve those opportunities and benefits.

The Arc's position statement on employment encourages that we "Build infrastructure and supports needed to phase out the issuance of subminimum wage certificates, increase opportunities for competitive integrated employment, and put in place safeguards to protect the interests of any people affected by this shift." In line with that position, we applaud AbilityOne's recent declaration and call for action that stated in part:

Our call to action is for all qualified nonprofit agencies participating in the AbilityOne Program to commit to, and begin (if not maintain), paying at least the Federal minimum wage, or state minimum wage if higher, to all employees who are blind or have significant disabilities working on AbilityOne contracts.

Conclusion

We are living in a time when policies, practices, and legal activities are converging to make the road to employment smoother for individuals with disabilities. We must remember that a job is an essential part of what gives many people standing in their community. Individuals with disabilities are succeeding in meaningful careers in a wide range of private businesses, government agencies and nonprofit organizations, while others are becoming entrepreneurs with their own micro-businesses. We have moved from a time when the thought of individuals with disabilities having a job was a dream, through a time when the only options were sheltered workshops, into a new era where there is meaningful and competitive work for individuals with disabilities. The value in having a response to "what do you do?" is immeasurable for individuals with disabilities across the country.

The Arc advocates a forceful, coordinated effort to build up opportunities for integrated community employment. Our focus is on supporting chapters to be successful in this transition and to drive change in the field, including making sure that policy and funding support that evolution. The Arc will continue working toward its goal of integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. Thank you for your consideration.

Attachment: Employment Position Statement, The Arc 2012