



Easter Seals

Office of Public Affairs
1425 K Street, N.W.
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005
202.347.3066 phone
202.347.7385 tty
202.737.7914 fax
www.easterseals.com

**STATEMENT TO THE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON INCREASING COMPETITIVE
INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

JANUARY 22 & 23, 2015 PUBLIC MEETING

BY

**KATY BEH NEAS
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS
EASTER SEALS, INC.**

Dear Advisory Committee Members,

Congratulations on your appointments to serve on the Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities (the Committee) to advise the Secretary of Labor on ways to increase opportunities for individuals with disabilities in competitive integrated employment. Throughout the next two year, the Committee will meet to discuss and develop key findings and recommendations. Easter Seals is a leading non-profit organization that helps individuals with disabilities reach their potential through community-based services and supports. I hope you will turn to Easter Seals and our affiliate employment network as a resource as you write interim and final reports during the tenure of the Committee. I have highlighted below Easter Seals' experience and expertise in helping individuals with disabilities find jobs in their communities. In addition, I ask that you consider the following recommendations as the Committee develops its final recommendations to the Secretary of Labor.

EASTER SEALS EMPLOYMENT EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE:

Easter Seals has made employing people with disabilities a top priority across our national affiliate network. Easter Seals recognizes that employment is critical for individuals with disabilities to achieve greater independence and economic self-sufficiency. Employment also gives people purpose, dignity, self-esteem, and a sense of accomplishment and pride. Easter Seals assists individuals with disabilities in finding

employment that meets their interests and is consistent with their employment goals. More than fifty Easter Seals affiliates specialize in helping people with disabilities enter or reenter the workforce. Easter Seals employment specialists work individually with jobseekers with disabilities throughout the employment process, from initial employment planning and benefits counseling (through the Work Incentives and Planning Assistance and other programs) to working with the individual to write an individual employment plan, develop new skills, conduct job search, connect to work experiences, secure a job and provide ongoing employment supports. Easter Seals also specializes in preparing youth with disabilities for their transition to adulthood through programs focused on improving career preparation, postsecondary education and competitive employment. For example, Easter Seals Massachusetts helps youth with disabilities become tomorrow's leaders through its Youth Leadership Network; Easter Seals New Jersey helps young adults with disabilities pursue higher education and specialty careers through their High School – High Tech program; and Easter Seals Tri-State, Easter Seals Southeast Wisconsin, Easter Seals Iowa and other affiliates provide work-based learning experiences to transition-aged youth through Project SEARCH programs. In addition, Easter Seals meets the needs of individuals who benefit from and choose the extra services and supports offered through center-based programs. Last year, Easter Seals helped develop new skills and find jobs for about 80,000 individuals with disabilities and others with barriers to employment. We have a tradition at Easter Seals where we ring a bell for every employment success. Hardly a day goes by where Easter Seals bells are not ringing loudly and repeatedly.

EASTER SEALS EMPLOYMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:

Easter Seals recommends that the Committee make full funding and implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) its top priority. Easter Seals strongly supported WIOA and its provisions aimed at increasing opportunities for individuals with disabilities in competitive integrated employment. In particular, Easter Seals recommends that the Committee emphasizes implementation and funding of WIOA Section 422 related to pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities (including the 15 percent State vocational rehabilitation fund set-aside), Section 461 and 604 related to supported employment services for adults and youth with significant disabilities, and Section 511 related to the limitation on use of subminimum wages to ensure employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) remains the option of last resort, particularly for youth with significant disabilities. Easter Seals understands that early access to employment services and supports for individuals with disabilities maximizes their ability to succeed in competitive integrated employment. Full implementation of these key provisions as written in law must be a top priority.

Easter Seals recommends that the Committee highlight the critical role of transportation education and travel instruction in increasing successful transition outcomes for students with disabilities. Access to transportation improves employment and education outcomes and promotes greater independence and community inclusion. The U.S. Government Accountability Office concluded (GAO-12-594 report) that students with disabilities continue to face enormous challenges in accessing appropriate services and supports as they transition from high school into postsecondary education or the workforce, including limited access to and travel knowledge of reliable public transportation. The GAO included comments from one state noting

“limited funding for transportation services contributes to the lack of transportation for students with disabilities.” In a separate state-specific study (Simonsen/Neubert), researchers found that mobility education and training was a strong predictor of post-school outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities to move to integrated employment settings. Easter Seals is a national expert and operates national technical assistance centers for the U.S. Department of Transportation in promoting universal access to transportation for people with disabilities. Easter Seals places a strong emphasis on transportation education and travel training in its employment and transition programs. With an estimated one-third of all American students with disabilities at transition age, focusing now on transportation education and travel training is critical to achieving continued and long-term success. Easter Seals encourages the Committee to leverage the expertise and experiences of Easter Seals’ transportation group in the development of your reports.

Easter Seals asks the Committee to recommend the Secretary of Labor implement a pilot to fund the transition of a center-based program and to study the employment and community participation impact the transition had on former center-based program participants over a five year period. The Committee is responsible for reviewing the use of the 14(c) certificate program and examining ways to improve oversight of the use of such certificates. WIOA made meaningful changes to help ensure all individuals with disabilities, particularly youth under age 24, have meaningful access to employment services and supports to help them achieve competitive integrated employment. Implementation of WIOA Section 511, as indicated above, must remain the Committee’s top priority. However, research is needed to examine the impact eliminating or further limiting employment opportunities afforded under Section 14(c) would have on individuals’ ability to earn income and participate in their communities. Easter Seals believe the Secretary has the authority to fund and implement such as study under WIOA Section 169 (Research, Studies and MultiState Projects) and encourages the Committee to include the recommendation in its final report.

CONCLUSION:

Thank you for your consideration of Easter Seals recommendations. I hope the Committee will turn to Easter Seals throughout the next two years for advice and counsel on best practices and other recommendations for increasing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in competitive integrated employment. Thank you.