



Testimony to the Commerce Committee
February 21, 2012

By Nora Duncan, Executive Director

In support of Raised House Bill # 5105:

AN ACT CONCERNING THE JOB EXPANSION TAX CREDIT PROGRAM AND INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING CERTAIN SERVICES FROM THE DEPARTMENTS OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES.

The Arc Connecticut is a 60-year old advocacy organization committed to protecting the rights of people with intellectual, cognitive, and developmental disabilities and to promoting opportunities for their full inclusion in the life of their communities.

Full inclusion in the life of one's community means many things to many people. For individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, a major consideration in full inclusion is the opportunity to seek, access and maintain meaningful employment and increased independence.

The Arc United States released a comprehensive survey in June that found that the unemployment rate for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities is nearly 85% nationwide and that many individuals surveyed expressed a desire to work. The same is true here in Connecticut and the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and self-advocate groups alike are prioritizing employment through public policy changes and advocacy efforts.

Raised House Bill #5105 offers valuable incentives for employers of all sizes who hire those individuals that DDS serves through 2013. The Commerce Committee should be commended for raising this bill and helping to align business tax policies with the policies of its Executive Branch agencies supporting individuals with disabilities in the community. When this bill passes, and I am confident it will, The Arc Connecticut will work to inform the business community about the tax credit program and further promote the hiring of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

Below you will find an Op Ed published in October, which is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The author, Jamie Lazaroff, is a self-advocate leader with The Arc and an appointed member of several Boards and Commissions. Jamie highlighted in his OP Ed the importance of tax credits. Jamie speaks about the value of work from first hand experience and he speaks on behalf of so many of his peers. I encourage you to take the time to read it and fully appreciate the self-worth and self-respect that Jamie derives from his work.

I thank the Committee for this opportunity to testify and for raising this important bill. Please do not hesitate to call upon The Arc Connecticut for more information or further clarification of our position.

OP-ED | It's National Disability Employment Awareness Month

by Jamie Lazaroff | Oct 12, 2011 11:55pm
CTNewsJunkie.com



Jamie Lazaroff

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. I am employed as a self-advocate coordinator at The Arc of Quinebaug Valley and I love working with my peers in The Arc movement to raise awareness about, and increase opportunity for, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is nearly double the rate for Americans without a disability. This trend has to stop. The goal of the hiring process should be to attract and identify the individual who is best suited for the job. This includes individuals with disabilities. When we work toward and achieve this goal as a community, both the employer and employee benefit from an inclusive work environment that facilitates the retention of all qualified workers. Connecticut even has a new **Vocational Rehabilitation Job Creation Tax Credit Program** for employers that can help move us toward this goal.

Studies show that people with an intellectual or developmental disability take less time-off from work than people who do not have a disability. My observations show that if you have high expectations for individuals with an intellectual or developmental disability they will meet, and even exceed, them.

I know first-hand that people with any disability want to work, just like anyone else does. We need a chance to succeed and increase our independence and community involvement, just like anyone else does. We want to feel valued, respected and appreciated, just like anyone else does. We need to be given hard tasks that come with the opportunity to fail and also the opportunity to pick ourselves up and learn from that experience, just like anyone else does. We need to be given real challenges so that we can gain real success and pride, just like anyone else does. We need the right to advance as far as we can in any task, without artificial limits, interventions or prejudgments from others, just like anyone else does.

I hope every reader will take the time to learn a little bit more about increasing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities of all kinds. Visit the **US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy** for more information. Visit **The Arc Connecticut** to learn about program, services and opportunities in you community.

Follow Jamie on Twitter @jman197633
Follow The Arc Connecticut on Twitter @TheArcCT

Jamie Lazaroff is the Self Advocate Coordinator for The Arc of Quinebaug Valley, a Board of Directors Member at The Arc Connecticut, and a Transition Team Member for Commissioner Macy, CT Department of Developmental Services.