

Testimony on HB 7093

An Act Establishing a Task Force to Increase Employment for Persons With Disabilities

Human Services Committee

February 19, 2019

Thank you Co-Chairs Senator Moore and Representative Abercrombie, Vice Chairs Senator Maroney and Representative Wilson Pheanious and Ranking Members Senator Logan and Representative Case and other esteemed members of the Human Services Committee for the opportunity to express strong support for HB 7093.

Many states, including Connecticut, have struggled to increase employment for people with disabilities. A successful effort to do so will yield greater socialization, integration, individual self-worth, as well as deeper personal relationships that will benefit an individual with disabilities throughout their lives. Greater employment for individuals with disabilities also yields a positive return on taxpayer investment: studies show that every \$1 spent on well-executed supported employment resulting in a competitive wage job yields \$1.46 in sales and income taxes alone generated by the individual working.

Experience in other states shows that progress can most effectively be made by taking advantage of the transition period between school and adulthood, in the same way a person without a disability goes forward in life. We must make the transition to adult life more constructive for each individual with a disability by aligning legislation, practices and funding to support their employment goals and reach positive outcomes. Transition should not be a cliff, like it now appears to families. Transition should be an elevator.

Capacity needs to be built to access to employment planning, vocational and social skill-building, search resources, and ongoing individualized job supports and accommodations. This can be accomplished by:

1. Start Transition at age 14 with a robust planning instrument like Charting the LifeCourse, and use the key elements of Customized Employment to address the vocational piece.
2. Braid existing federal funding associated with transition and vocational planning between the State Department of Education, the Department of Rehabilitative Services and the Department of Developmental

- Services to bring to bear each agency's expertise during the transition period and thereafter.
3. Develop a statewide community of practice for families, educators, support providers, and employers to align transition census, skill-building, expectations, and employer needs.
 4. Publicly celebrate successes of all types as they occur so employment becomes first an aspiration, and then an expectation.

Areas that we feel need to be investigated by this Task Force in order to provide and enhance a continuum of employment resources:

1. Opportunities for self-employment and business ownership.
2. Opportunities to work with and, in the case of people with I/DD who own small businesses, employ people without disabilities.
3. Fair and reasonable wages and benefits.
4. Opportunities for post-secondary education, including college and vocational training, to gain knowledge and skills to allow people to get better jobs.
5. The ability to explore new directions over time and, at the appropriate time, retire.
6. Opportunities to work and increase earnings and assets without losing eligibility for needed public benefits.
7. Structuring effective relationships with employers of all sizes.

We applaud the inclusive structure proposed for the task force and suggest that organizations engaged in policy and advocacy in the disability community be consulted for their perspectives, if not directly involved.

Thank you for the opportunity to support this legislation. For many individuals with disabilities, employment is a viable, but rarely attainable gateway to meaningful friendships, happiness, and an identity based on ability rather than disability. Developing a plan and resources to increase employment for persons with disabilities will result in a clearer path toward choice and independence, stronger economic growth, and more inclusive and cohesive communities.

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