

Testimony of Shelagh McClure, Vice Chair
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Before the Committee on Human Services
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Submitted to: hstestimony@cga.ct.gov

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of **RAISED H.B. No. 7093 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT OPPORUNITIES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

I am Vice Chair of the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities, a public agency whose mission is to promote independence and full inclusion of individuals with developmental disabilities in their communities, and to foster capacity building and system change. I am also the parent of a 28-year old son with Down Syndrome who lives at home with my husband and me. My son works part-time at a job that pays minimum wage, and he is a valued member of the office where he has worked for over three years.

The issue of disability employment requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach. This is because the issue is complex, and the statistics are sobering. People with disabilities have a significantly lower labor force participation rate than their non-disabled peers. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in 2017 fewer than 20% of people with disabilities were in the labor force or actively looking for work, vs. 64% of their non-disabled peers. In addition, in 2017, the unemployment rate nationally for persons with a disability was 9.2 percent, more than twice that of those with no disability (4.2 percent).

People with disabilities are much more likely to be employed in part-time rather than full-time jobs. In 2017, 32 percent of people with disabilities were employed part-time, compared to 17 percent of their non-disabled peers. All of these facts affect the ability of persons with disabilities to be economically self-sufficient.

The most recent national report on employment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) tells a similar story. In 2013, Special Olympics released a report on employment of adults with I/DD, *National Snapshot of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities in the Labor Force*, <https://www.specialolympics.org/our-work/research/national-snapshot-of-adults-with-intellectual-disabilities-in-the-labor-force>, (herein after, the "Snapshot"). Although the Snapshot reported a higher labor participation rate of 34% than the 2017 BLS report, discouragingly, it also reported a higher unemployment rate of 21% (=27% of individuals with I/DD were employed). Of those employed, only 53 percent reported working for competitive (at least minimum) wages, while 38 percent worked in sheltered workshops, which pay below, often substantially below, minimum wage. In addition, only 26% of workers with I/DD reported that they were working fulltime compared to 73% of their non-disabled peers.

The members of this proposed task force will have a daunting job—unemployment or underemployment make independence and economic self-sufficiency a distant goal. Other states are trying to address this problem, and have made disability employment a priority. One state, Delaware, provides an interesting guide on how we might proceed. It's Governor, Jay Carney, has issued the following recommendations:

- make disability employment part of the state workforce development strategy,
- find and support businesses hiring disabled workers,

- be a model employer by increasing the number of people with disabilities working in the state government, and
- provide youth with disabilities with career training.

There are a number bills of before the legislature this session that should be considered by this task force, including tax credits and other incentives for employers to employ people with disabilities (see eg **HB 5546**, **HB 7049**), ending the subminimum wage (**HB 6739**), and better access to the training available through our vocational and technical schools (**HB 6220**). In addition, recently, Senator Casey from Pennsylvania introduced two bills in the U.S. Senate: **S. 260**, which would freeze new 14c (subminimum wage) certificates and phase out the existing certificates over a 6-year period, and provide grants for provider transformation from sheltered workshops/group employment to competitive employment; and **S. 255**, which would increase 3 tax credits that provide incentives for employing people with disabilities. These bills provide some guidance on reasonable measures to be considered by the task force.

The Council supports all efforts to increase employment of people with disabilities. It is an issue the we have been working on, including our current initiative on Customized Employment, which matches employee interests and strengths with employer needs. It is particularly well suited for individuals with complex disabilities who have an especially hard time finding jobs. We have trained 18 agencies and 97 individuals in Customized Employment. This is just one effort we have undertaken to deal with the difficult issue of disability employment.

Disability employment is an issue that will require an ongoing dedication of State resources, as we transform the current system in which few people with intellectual disabilities work for competitive wages, and many will soon be transition out of sheltered workshops/group employment where they earn less

than minimum wage. Having alternatives available for these individuals, as well as the upcoming high school graduates is a challenge that must be confronted, and better options must be developed. The Council supports the taskforce as a first step in addressing the issue.

Links to:

S. 260: Transformation to Competitive Employment Act
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/260>

S, 255: Disability Employment Incentive Act
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/255>

Doing the math, this means only **14.3%** of adults with I/DD reported they were working and being paid at least minimum wage (27% (34% -7% (unemployed) x 53%), and **7%** of adults with I/DD reported they work fulltime (27% x 26%).