



Testimony of Shannon Jacovino
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SB 5 An Act Establishing a Workforce Pipeline and Job Creation Task Force Commerce
Labor & Public Employees Committee
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Thank-you Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, the members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

My name is Shannon Jacovino. I am the Director of Advocacy & Public Policy for The Arc Connecticut, the state's oldest and largest advocacy organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families. The Arc was founded more than 65 years ago by parents who believed that their loved ones with I/DD should have the same rights and opportunities to live, work and play in the community just like everyone else and we have remained a parent-led civil rights movement ever since. In Connecticut, our 14 Arc local chapters deliver over \$100 million in jobs and supports to thousands of people in 162 communities

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of SB 5 An Act Establishing a Workforce Pipeline and Job Creation Task Force, but I ask you amend this bill to include at least one seat on the task force to be filled with at least one representative from the disability community.

The historic lack of prioritization of employment outcomes for people with I/DD and other disabilities has resulted in some grim statistics: the percentage of people with I/DD nationwide who receive state agency support and work in community jobs is 20% and only 12-14% work in individual integrated employment. (2016-2017 National Core Indicators Project)

Many states, including Connecticut, have struggled to make improvements and 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.

Other areas that we feel need to be developed are:

1. Offering tax incentives for businesses that employ people with disabilities.
2. Increasing opportunities for self-employment and business ownership for people with disabilities.
3. Increasing opportunities for post-secondary education, including college and vocational training, to gain knowledge and skills to allow people to get better jobs.
4. Increasing opportunities to work and increase earnings and assets without losing eligibility for needed public benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to support this legislation with amendments. 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 opportunities 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.