



## FACT SHEET

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### EMPLOYMENT

#### Background

Working age people with disabilities are among the most unemployed and underemployed segments of our society. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that the official unemployment rate for people with disabilities in February 2009 was 14% (8.7% for those with no disability). While this statistic is alarming, even more troubling is the lack of labor force participation by people with disabilities. BLS reported that for the same month only 23% of adults with disabilities were in the labor force as compared with 71% of the non-disabled. The vast majority of these individuals can work and want to work.

The state vocational rehabilitation (VR) program is significantly under funded to meet the employment needs of hundreds of thousands of individuals with severe disabilities who need VR services to obtain employment. Many individuals with disabilities could also greatly benefit from the employment and training services delivered through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) One-Stop system, though the WIA track record for serving people with disabilities is very poor. Physical and programmatic access to WIA services is woefully lacking for individuals with disabilities, despite Federal requirements that such services be accessible.

In each of the past three Congresses, bills to reauthorize WIA and VR have been introduced or discussed. A number of good provisions were included in these bills including strengthening transition services for special education students, expanding supported employment services and improving physical and programmatic access to one-stops.

#### Action Taken by Congress and the Administration

Legislation to reauthorize WIA and Vocational Rehabilitation has yet to be introduced in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. The House Education and Labor Committee is holding hearings on WIA.

On the appropriations front, the President has not yet submitted a detailed budget plan and the Appropriations Committee is preparing their bills.

#### Recommendations

The Congress should:

- Place a high priority on reauthorizing WIA and VR;
- Assure that people with disabilities have physical and programmatic access to the WIA system;

- Assure that WIA prioritizes services to people with disabilities and dedicates funding to those services.
- Support expanded supported employment services by removing the 18 month limit that VR has to pay for SE.
- Improve transition services by strengthening the VR role in the transition from school to adult life for students with disabilities, particularly requiring VR counselors to actively participate in the IEP process.
- Increase funding for the VR and WIA system, including increasing funding for Supported Employment State Grant program and dedicated funding for transition services.;

### **Relevant Committees**

House Appropriations Committee

House Education and Labor (WIA and VR)

Senate Appropriations Committee

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (WIA and VR)

For more information, please contact The Arc and United Cerebral Palsy Disability Policy Collaboration (202) 783-2229, Association of University Centers on Disability (301) 588-8252, American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (202) 387-1968, National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (202) 506-5813 or the Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (802) 760-8856.

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