



Easter Seals

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May 23, 2014

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
U.S. Senate HELP Committee

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate HELP Committee

The Honorable John Kline, Chairman,
U.S. House Education and Workforce Committee

The Honorable George Miller, Ranking Member
U.S. House Education and Workforce Committee

The Honorable Patty Murray, Member
U.S. Senate HELP Subcommittee on Employment
and Workplace Safety

The Honorable Johnny Isakson, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate HELP Subcommittee on Employment
and Workplace Safety

The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Chairwoman
U.S. House Subcommittee on Higher Education and
Workforce Training

The Honorable Ruben Hinojosa, Ranking Member
U.S. House Subcommittee on Higher Education
and Workforce Training

Dear Senators Harkin, Alexander, Murray and Isakson and Representatives Kline, Miller, Foxx and Hinojosa:

On behalf of Easter Seals' national affiliate network and individuals with disabilities and other jobseekers we work with to develop new skills and find jobs, I want to commend you on the release of the bipartisan Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This bill represents a significant advancement for jobseekers with disabilities by providing them with early access to employment services and supports to help them find jobs in their communities.

Employment is critical to an individual's independence and self-sufficiency. It is why Easter Seals – a national nonprofit provider of community-based services for people with disabilities, older adults and veterans – has made employment a national priority. Unfortunately, many people with disabilities struggle to break into the labor force. Double digit unemployment rates are the standard, not the exception. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act will help address the employment challenges facing people with disabilities through the goals and provisions included in the section (Title IV) that relates to services for people with disabilities.

Easter Seals is especially pleased your bill will provide students with disabilities with early access to pre-employment transition services, such as work-based learning experiences, job exploration and workplace

readiness training. Early access to employment services helps to increase employment outcomes and workplace success. Within the first few pages of Title IV, you note the “high proportion” of students with disabilities who are leaving high school with limited post-secondary options and the “substantial need” for services and supports to help these students during their transition. Your bill goes beyond just highlighting the problem, it includes key provisions – including the 15 percent set aside within vocational rehabilitation for pre-employment services for students with disabilities – that will help put these youth on a pathway to career satisfaction and financial security.

Thank you again for your leadership in updating our nation’s workforce system and in increasing employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities. Easter Seals stands ready to assist you in securing final congressional approval for this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katy Beh Neas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katy Beh Neas
Senior Vice President, Government Relations