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Dear Member of Congress:

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) is a coalition of over 100 national disability organizations and advocates for national public policy that ensures the inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. The Employment and Training Task Force is a smaller group within the coalition that addresses Federal disability employment issues, working to secure national public policy that advances self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion in employment for individuals with disabilities.

The undersigned member organizations of the CCD Employment and Training Task Force have very strong reservations about H.R. 27, the legislation to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. As amended and reported out of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, the bill does make some positive changes for people with disabilities, including the transition provisions for youth with disabilities, inclusion of the employment needs of people with disabilities in the local plan development process, and enhancements to the protection and advocacy system. Regrettably, the current bill falls short of ensuring meaningful access or improved services for people with disabilities at the WIA One-Stops. It also includes provisions that would significantly hinder the ability of individuals with disabilities to access services through the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) program. **Without amendments to fully correct these shortcomings, CCD urges you to oppose H.R. 27 when it comes before you for a vote on the House floor.**

#### **Infrastructure and Core Services Funding**

Under current law, Rehabilitation Act - Title 1 funds must be used exclusively for services for individuals with disabilities. Unfortunately, H.R. 27 authorizes a governor to strip funds from all mandatory partners to pay for the administrative costs of operating the WIA One-Stops. It does so with minimal assurances that the One-Stops will increase access or improve employment and training services to individuals with disabilities or any other populations served by the other mandatory partners. We must not allow erosion of this program by giving the State the authority to use funding designated for serving individuals with disabilities for other purposes. CCD strongly opposes this provision in H.R. 27. We recommend that Congress fund the costs of operating One-Stops with a supplemental dedicated stream of funding in combination with the current cost allocation model.

Individuals with disabilities are striving to lead lives of independence and self-sufficiency. With proper supports and training, such individuals can achieve great success in competitive employment. With limited funding, the state VR programs have effectively provided job counseling, training and other employment related supports necessary to remove the barriers to successful employment for those

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individuals who are able to access VR services. In 2003, 217,000 of the 1.5 million persons with disabilities served by the VR system entered or re-entered the workplace, earning \$3.5 billion in wages, and paying \$935 million in federal, state, local, Social Security and Medicare taxes. Despite these efforts, the VR system can only serve approximately 5 % of those who could benefit under the current funding structure and the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities continues to hover around 70 %. Unfortunately, this provision in H.R. 27 will result in potentially devastating losses rather than gains in each state for vocational rehabilitation services.

### **Performance Measures and Accountability**

We are very concerned with the movement towards uniform performance measures for the workforce development system, which includes vocational rehabilitation. Many individuals with disabilities require individualized services that cannot be easily measured in a uniform system. To effectively determine successful outcomes of rehabilitation employment services and supports, the system must allow for alternative assessment strategies that are responsive to the unique service and support needs of individuals with disabilities.

### **Reclassification of the Rehabilitation Services Administration Senior Ranking Official**

H.R. 27 would reduce the status of the Commissioner of Rehabilitative Services Administration within the Department of Education. CCD believes that this change would fundamentally weaken the voice for vocational rehabilitation in the Department of Education. A strong voice and presence for disability employment issues is needed within the education bureaucracy. We oppose any limitations placed on the current status of RSA Commissioner.

### **WIA Plus Proposal**

The Administration has proposed giving governors the authority to merge five additional programs into the WIA block grant, including the state's VR program. The proposal would eliminate specialized assistance to disabled and homeless veterans, critical job training services for workers under the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act, and specialized counseling and customized assistance for people with disabilities through VR agencies. People with disabilities would have to compete with each other and other individuals with barriers to employment for a share of declining resources without the protections and requirements under current law. We strongly urge you to oppose any effort to adopt this misguided plan.

The reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act has traditionally provided the opportunity to review and continually improve employment and training services for individuals with disabilities. We are very concerned that H.R. 27 not only fails to continue this trend, but in fact, if passed as reported from Committee, could cause substantial harm. **Without changes that address our concerns, once again, CCD asks for your opposition to the bill.**

Sincerely,

American Association on Mental Retardation  
American Congress of Community Supports and Employment Services  
American Counseling Association  
American Foundation for the Blind  
American Network of Community Options and Resources  
American Psychological Association  
APSE: The Network on Employment

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Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Brain Injury Association of America

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

Easter Seals, Inc.

Enable America

Goodwill Industries International, Inc.

Inter/National Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation

Learning Disabilities Association of America

National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems

National Association of Rehabilitation and Research Training Centers

National Down Syndrome Congress

National Rehabilitation Association

NISH--creating employment opportunities for people with severe disabilities

Paralyzed Veterans of America

Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America

TASH

The Arc of the United States

United Cerebral Palsy