

**Questions for the Record from REPRESENTATIVE GLENN GROTHMAN (R-WI)**

**Committee on Education and Workforce  
Field Hearing titled: “Work, Dignity, and Choice in Disability Employment”**

**Friday, February 13, 2026  
10:15 A.M.**

**Question(s) for Barbara LeDuc, President and CEO, Opportunities Inc.**

**1. In your written testimony, it says that you have prior experience in community-integrated employment. Will you explain what community-integrated employment is and why it may not be the right fit for everyone?**

Community-integrated employment—also referred to as competitive integrated employment (CIE)—is employment for people with disabilities in the competitive labor market in which workers earn at least minimum wage, have access to benefits where applicable, and work alongside coworkers without disabilities in comparable roles.

At the same time, we must be candid: CIE is not appropriate or achievable for every person with a disability, even when support is offered. Some individuals face significant barriers related to the nature or severity of their disabilities, including difficulty meeting productivity expectations or managing the pace, stamina, consistency, and social and environmental demands of competitive workplaces. When placement decisions are driven by ideology rather than individualized assessment, repeated unsuccessful attempts can undermine confidence, increase anxiety, and disrupt stability. Some individuals also require ongoing behavioral or personal care supports that typical workplaces are not resourced to provide consistently, including assistance with safety protocols or appropriate workplace conduct. While many employers can accommodate a slower work pace, they often cannot safely accommodate needs that materially affect coworkers or operations without sustained, specialized support.

That is why disability employment policy should protect a full continuum of options grounded in informed choice—so each person can pursue the pathway that fits their abilities, needs, and goals. Programs operating under Section 14(c) certificates can serve as an option for individuals who are not able to sustain CIE, offering structured environments, individualized pacing, consistent support, and opportunities for connection and purpose. Preserving access to Section 14(c) employment helps ensure that people who cannot realistically be served through CIE are not pushed out of work altogether and are instead supported to contribute in a setting not aligned with their needs.

**2. Your written testimony states that at 14(c) centers, individuals work at a pace suited to their disability.**

**a. Can you describe the workers you have here at Green Valley and the range of tasks that they typically perform?**

Green Valley supports people with a range of intellectual and developmental disabilities and related support needs by providing real work, individualized training, and consistent support. Assignments are matched to each person's strengths and may include light manufacturing and packaging, assembly, sorting and kitting, labeling, material preparation, and other contract-based tasks. Responsibilities are adapted to promoting successful participation, building skills, and ensuring quality outcomes. When appropriate, tasks are simplified or segmented so individuals can contribute meaningfully while developing new capabilities.

Section 14(c) wages are tied to individual productivity, consistent with federal law. These programs are not a replacement for CIE; they are a safety net that ensures access to paid work for individuals who would otherwise be excluded from employment opportunities. For many participants and families, the alternative is not higher wages—it is the loss of work, routine, purpose, and community connection that employment provides.

**b. Does competitive integrated employment typically offer the same level of personalized support?**

CIE can include support such as job coaching, vocational rehabilitation services, and workplace accommodation; however, the level, intensity, and duration of those supports vary widely by employer, funding source, and local capacity. In many settings, the ongoing one-to-one supervision and individualized pacing routinely available through CRPs is not feasible—particularly for individuals with higher support needs or co-occurring conditions. Employers often provide reasonable assistance and redirection, but they are rarely positioned to offer open-ended, intensive support over the long term. Without dependable funding for sustained supports, people who need higher levels of assistance are more likely to cycle through unstable placements rather than achieve durable employment outcomes.

In practice, a subset of individuals with significant support needs do not achieve sustained CIE outcomes despite services and accommodations. For these individuals, Section 14(c) programs can provide a structured setting for paid work, ongoing coaching, and stability. Eliminating access to Section 14(c) does not automatically expand CIE capacity; it can instead remove one of the few viable employment options available to people with the highest support needs, effectively substituting unemployment and isolation for work and engagement.

As one parent wrote in a letter to the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP): "I have a son with Down syndrome who is significantly limited both intellectually and physically. If his 14(c) program were eliminated, he would be heartbroken. There is no realistic way for him to achieve competitive integrated employment. I believe this because he has attempted it multiple times without success, and I know his abilities and limitations well." Families and self-advocates deserve to be heard in this debate, and policy should respect informed choice by ensuring that individuals can access the option that best aligns with their needs and supports long-term stability.

### **3. Why is it essential to have personalized support for individuals working at community rehabilitation providers (CRPs)?**

Personalized support is essential because disability is not one-size-fits-all, and employment services must be built around the individual—not around a single preferred model. Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) have long been among the largest providers of employment supports, including pathways to competitive integrated employment. Individuals who continue to receive center-based services often have multiple, significant disabilities and require specialized accommodation. Many have attempted community-based employment but were unable to sustain it due to factors such as early-onset dementia, mental health needs, behavioral or safety concerns, changes in family circumstances, elopement risk, self-injurious behavior, or personal care needs. As the saying goes, “If you have met one person with a disability, you have met one person with a disability.” CRP staff are trained to understand each person’s needs and to implement a person-centered plan that provides appropriate supports and programming.

Some individuals face barriers that make it unrealistic to work independently in a competitive setting without extensive, ongoing support. For caregivers and service providers, work is not only productive—it can be stabilizing and therapeutic—yet participation may require structured supervision and individualized assistance. Safety-related behaviors, including self-injury, must be addressed proactively to protect the individual and others. For people with higher support needs, sustained assistance may be necessary to function successfully in typical workplace environments. Specialized programs that allow for individualized pacing and recognize productivity below industrial standards can ensure that individuals are not excluded from work simply because they need more support to succeed.

CRPs expand economic opportunities for people with disabilities by offering work environments that build skills and affirm the dignity that comes with contributing. They support productivity in the least restrictive setting appropriate to the individual, recognizing that “least restrictive” must be determined person by person. These programs may compensate individuals based on measured productivity, as permitted under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, for a limited subset of individuals whose challenges related to skill acquisition, endurance, physical health, or behavioral support needs prevent performance at or near minimum-wage expectations even with support.

CRP staff receive specialized training to support individuals who face significant barriers to employment. For people who need elevated levels of assistance with activities of daily living, a facility-based setting can ensure that personal care and related support are available consistently and respectfully. Many participants want to work and be productive; however, they may be limited in the number of hours they can work due to medical needs, fatigue, transportation constraints, or other support requirements. Personalized support makes it possible for these individuals to participate in work safely and with dignity.

### **4. In what areas do 14(c) shops need additional support?**

In my experience, improving disability employment outcomes requires maintaining a true continuum of service options and aligning supports to individual needs and informed choice. CIE should be offered and pursued when appropriate; however, it is not achievable for every individual, including some people with significant support needs. When the only alternatives are limited day services or remaining at home, individuals lose meaningful opportunities for work, engagement, and community participation—an outcome that is neither person-centered nor consistent with the values of dignity and choice.

To protect choice and expand opportunity, Section 14(c) programs and CRPs need targeted support, including: (1) stable, adequate reimbursement rates so providers can recruit and retain qualified staff and deliver consistent, person-centered supports; (2) technical assistance and appropriate oversight to ensure compliance with federal and state requirements, including informed choice and proper use of Section 14(c); (3) resources to strengthen individualized career planning and meaningful pathways to CIE for individuals who seek it; and (4) investments in transportation and coordination with day services to reduce access barriers and prevent service gaps.

Outcomes should be measured in ways that reflect real-world stability and person-centered success—such as sustained participation in work, job stability, earnings relative to the individual's setting and productivity expectations, access to appropriate support, and maintenance of social connections. The policy objective should be clear and accountable: people with disabilities who want to work must have access to an appropriate employment pathway and the support needed to succeed whether in a Community Rehabilitation Program or Community Integrated Employment.