

February 13th, 2026

House Education and Workforce Committee
Honorable Tim Walberg, Chair
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Walberg, and Members of the Committee:

I write this letter on behalf of Access to Independence to address the topic for today's hearing: "Work, Dignity, and Choice in Disability Employment". Access to Independence is a disability-led and run Center for Independent Living (CIL) that serves people of any type of disability, across the lifespan, throughout four counties in south-central Wisconsin. Beaver Dam, the site of today's field hearing, is part of our region. Access to Independence is a part of a state and national network of CILs that provide advocacy, resources and services that empower people with disabilities to have the same opportunities to live the American Dream as those without disabilities.

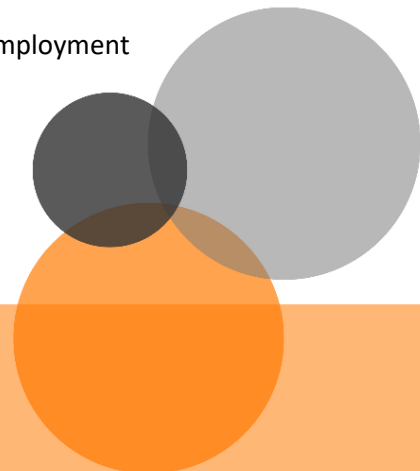
Access to Independence firmly believes in dignity and choice in employment for people with disabilities. However, the choice should never include wages below minimum wage, and should not include segregated employment settings. Proponents of such wages and settings rely on outdated myths that have been rejected by a number of states across the country who have banned these practices.

For example, it is believed that the use of 14(c) certificates is necessary because minimum wages (or higher) would disqualify disabled employees from accessing needed benefits, such as Medicaid-funded long-term care services. Two policies that were designed to address this include Medicaid Buy-In programs in states, and ABLE accounts.

Another myth is that people with disabilities who work in sheltered workshop settings are incapable of working in competitive integrated workplaces, and would end up being stuck at home. This myth fails to understand that proper training and employment supports, as well as accommodations and wrap-around services, ensure that disabled people can succeed in competitive integrated employment settings, along with their non-disabled colleagues. Additionally, addressing the caregiver crisis and insufficient community transportation options is necessary to end the belief that the choice must include segregated employment for less than minimum wage.

Another solution to addressing the myths associated with competitive integrated employment

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is for Congress to enact legislation similar to that in the last session, known as the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act (TCIEA). That bill (if passed) not only would have ensured that all states end the practices of subminimum wage and segregated employment, but it would also have provided the time and resources needed to ensure that the transition was successful. I encourage committee members to consider supporting future similar legislation.

Finally, as a Center for Independent Living, Access to Independence takes pride in being a resource to support individuals who are in competitive integrated employment, or wish to be. Our work includes supporting individuals with disabilities to locate and apply for jobs, supporting people with disabilities who need to advocate for accommodations and support, and providing evaluations with individuals to determine the right assistive technology that reduces barriers to employment.

If you would like to engage us, or our national partners on this topic, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,



Jason Beloungy, Executive Director
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