



**Field Hearing Before the
U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce**

**“Work, Dignity, and Choice in Disability
Employment”**

**Written Testimony for the Record Submitted by:
Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)**

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Introduction

SHRM is a member-driven catalyst for creating better workplaces where people and businesses thrive together. As the trusted authority on all things work, SHRM is the foremost expert, researcher, advocate, and thought leader on issues and innovations impacting today's evolving workplaces. With nearly 340,000 members in 180 countries, SHRM touches the lives of more than 362 million workers and their families globally.

SHRM thanks the Committee for holding this field hearing on "Work, Dignity, and Choice in Disability Employment." These principles reflect not only core human values but also practical realities in today's labor market. Individuals with disabilities seek meaningful work that affirms their independence and allows them to choose their career paths. Employers increasingly recognize the value of inclusive workplaces but often lack consistent policy and operational support to implement effective inclusion practices at scale.

Why Disability Employment Matters: Scale, Impact, and Opportunity

Disability Prevalence and Workforce Participation

- More than 22 million working-age Americans live with disabilities. ([SHRM Report](#))
- Nearly 25% of people with disabilities participated in the U.S. civilian labor force in 2025, a historic high, yet this remains significantly below the 63% labor force participation of those without disabilities ([SHRM Report](#)).
- Workers with disabilities accounted for roughly 4.8% of the employed population, with notable increases among younger workers ([SHRM Report](#)).

These gaps reflect systemic barriers — from inaccessible hiring practices and lack of workplace accommodations to policy disincentives that reduce workforce participation.

Employer Experience and Organizational Performance

SHRM and SHRM Foundation research consistently shows:

- 97% of HR professionals report employees with disabilities perform as well as or better than peers ([SHRM Foundation Report](#)).
- 93% of employees say disability-inclusive workplaces are better places to work ([SHRM Foundation Report](#)).
- SHRM's *Empowering Talent: Disability in the Modern Workforce* (forthcoming February 18, 2026) finds that among employees with disabilities:
 - 82% report job satisfaction,
 - 81% report strong organizational commitment, and

- 83% express willingness to engage in AI-related upskilling.

These findings demonstrate that disability inclusion is not just a social or compliance matter — it drives measurable organizational results. Inclusive workplaces see higher retention, greater engagement, and enhanced adaptability, which translates into more productive teams, lower turnover costs, and stronger alignment with emerging workforce needs. For Congress, these outcomes illustrate that policies supporting inclusive hiring, skills development, and workplace accommodations strengthen both economic competitiveness and workforce resilience.

SHRM's Credibility and Longstanding Engagement on Disability Employment

Longstanding Partnership with the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

For nearly two decades, SHRM has partnered with the [U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy \(ODEP\)](#). This partnership has helped translate federal policy into practical workplace strategies, including technical assistance, training, research dissemination, and inclusive hiring guidance for HR professionals nationwide. SHRM's engagement with ODEP demonstrates credibility as a policy partner with direct experience in translating law into actionable employer practice.

Leadership Through Employer Coalitions and Initiatives

SHRM is a co-founder of the [CEO Commission for Disability Employment](#), elevating disability inclusion as a strategic business priority. Through this and other coalitions, SHRM engages executives in promoting evidence-based approaches to disability hiring and retention.

SHRM Foundation's Employing Abilities at Work Initiative

The SHRM Foundation provides a suite of free, evidence-based tools and trainings that help employers:

- Recruit, hire, retain, and advance individuals with disabilities,
- Implement accommodations effectively, and
- Build inclusive workplace culture and HR practices.

The Employing Abilities at Work Certificate Program allows HR professionals to gain skills in operationalizing inclusion strategies, ensuring that policy and practice translate into measurable workplace outcomes ([SHRM Foundation Report](#)).

Policy Framework: Work, Dignity, and Choice

WORK: Unlocking Competitive Integrated Employment

Barriers to Work

People with disabilities face barriers that limit access to competitive integrated employment, including inaccessible hiring practices and a lack of skills-aligned pathways.

Skills-First Hiring and Work-Based Learning

SHRM emphasizes skills-first hiring and work-based learning are proven strategies to connect individuals with disabilities to in-demand jobs:

- 82% of organizations find apprenticeships effective for closing talent gaps,
- 78% rate internships as effective, and
- 81% value mentorship programs for connecting talent to opportunity ([SHRM Report](#)).

These approaches align with broader workforce objectives, including WIOA, particularly in career pathways, employer engagement, and integrated service delivery. WIOA is broader than disability, but these intersections support equitable access to meaningful employment when implemented inclusively.

Employer Implementation Gaps

Despite strong outcomes, many organizations lack formal inclusion programs:

- Only 13% of organizations report formal disability-specific initiatives, and
- The majority of managers/HR professionals report no prior disability inclusion training ([SHRM Foundation Report](#)).

These gaps highlight a critical disconnect between proven benefits of disability inclusion and routine workplace practice. Without structured programs, organizations may struggle to translate policy into action, limiting the ability of employees with disabilities to fully contribute. Scalable incentives, practical guidance, and technical assistance can help employers adopt evidence-based inclusion strategies, ensuring that high-performing talent is recruited, retained, and developed effectively.

DIGNITY: Removing Structural Barriers That Discourage Workforce Participation

Benefits Cliffs and Economic Security

Many individuals with disabilities face a sudden loss of benefits when entering employment or advancement at their job. SHRM recommends modernizing public benefit structures to reduce employment disincentives, ensuring that individuals can pursue work without losing critical supports such as SSI or Medicaid. Policies should provide predictable, gradual transitions that

maintain financial security and healthcare coverage, support workforce participation, and safeguard essential benefits.

ABLE Accounts and Financial Stability

Amendments to the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act demonstrate how policy can expand opportunity:

- Eligibility was expanded from age 26 to 46, increasing the potential pool from approximately 8 million to roughly 14 million individuals ([SHRM Report](#)).
- ABLE accounts allow individuals to save without jeopardizing means-tested benefits. Congress could further enhance workforce participation and financial security by allowing or incentivizing employers to contribute to ABLE accounts.

CHOICE: Inclusive Workplaces and Career Advancement

Employee Engagement and Advancement Readiness

Choice in employment extends beyond hiring. It includes the ability to advance, to build skills, and to participate in emerging sectors of the economy.

As reflected in SHRM's forthcoming research cited above, employees with disabilities report high levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and willingness to upskill in emerging technologies. These findings underscore that workers with disabilities are not on the margins of workforce transformation — they are prepared to contribute to it.

For employers, supporting choice means ensuring that advancement pathways, training opportunities, and performance systems are accessible and skills based. When workplaces are structured to evaluate capability rather than assumption, individuals with disabilities are positioned to compete, grow, and lead. Policies that reinforce skills development, career mobility, and inclusive workforce design strengthen both individual opportunity and organizational performance.

Organizational Benefits of Inclusion

93% of employees report that disability-inclusive workplaces are better overall ([SHRM Foundation Report](#)). This demonstrates that inclusion delivers tangible workplace benefits: organizations with inclusive practices experience stronger retention, higher engagement, and improved overall performance. Supporting these practices through policy and guidance helps employers expand opportunity for workers with disabilities while strengthening their workforce.

Policy Recommendations

1. Modernize public benefit structures to reduce employment disincentives, ensuring that individuals with disabilities can pursue work without sudden loss of critical supports such as SSI or Medicaid, while maintaining financial security and healthcare coverage.

2. Encourage skills-first hiring and work-based learning pathways, including programs aligned with WIOA objectives such as career pathways and employer engagement, to connect individuals with disabilities to in-demand jobs.
3. Facilitate employer involvement in ABLE accounts via supportive laws or incentives, enabling employers to make contributions to employees' ABLE savings to boost financial stability and workforce loyalty.

Conclusion

Expanding work, dignity, and choice in disability employment is both a moral responsibility and an economic necessity. With more than 22 million working-age Americans with disabilities and persistent workforce shortages across industries, the opportunity is clear: when individuals with disabilities are fully included, workers, workplaces, and the broader economy all benefit.

SHRM is committed to partnering with Congress, federal agencies, employers, and workforce leaders to advance practical, bipartisan, and evidence-based solutions that expand access to work, strengthen economic independence, and ensure individuals with disabilities can contribute their full talents in today's labor market. The path forward is not only about inclusion — it is about building a stronger, more competitive workforce for the future.

To learn more about SHRM's priorities, please contact SHRM Government Affairs at governmentaffairs@shrm.org.