

## **Minority Views**

### **H.R. 7989, the “ThinkDIFFERENTLY About Disability Employment Act”**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 44.1 million Americans are people with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> Individuals born with disabilities have different experiences than individuals who acquire disabilities later in life. Even with this diversity, it is important to ensure that all Americans are duly included and accommodated in the workplace and business community.

However, only 26 percent of people with disabilities participate in America’s labor force. Still, they have a higher rate of self-employment (17 percent) than non-disabled Americans (11 percent). People with disabilities often choose entrepreneurship over joining the labor force for several reasons, including greater flexibility and inclusion with respect to work scheduling and environment.<sup>2</sup> There are about 1.8 million small businesses owned by people with disabilities in the U.S.<sup>3</sup> Owning a small business is a major pathway for all Americans, especially people with disabilities, to achieve self-sufficiency.

Under the legislation, SBA would enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Council on Disability (NCD) to promote entrepreneurship and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The role of the (NCD) is to make recommendations to the President, Congress, Federal agencies, State, tribal communities, and local governments on policies affecting Americans with Disabilities. The Council is an independent federal agency comprised of nine members - four appointed by the leadership in Congress and five appointed by the President. In Fiscal Year 2024, the Council received \$3.8 million in federal funding. Since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the NCD has played a key role in analyzing the needs of people with disabilities.

On January 30, 2024, the Committee’s Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development Subcommittee held a hearing entitled “Pathways to Success: Supporting Entrepreneurs and Employees with Disabilities.” The hearing focused on the role entrepreneurs and employees with disabilities play in the workforce and examined ways to empower them. In testimony, Mr. Keith Wargo, President and CEO of Autism Speaks reported, “many individuals with disabilities have the skills and desire to work, and hiring neurodiverse people benefits the companies they work for, and the overall economy.” He further cited a study that showed “companies that actively seek to hire people with disabilities outperform businesses that do not. Their revenues, net income, profit margins were all higher. Further analysis revealed that the U.S. GDP could get a boost of up to \$25 billion if more people with disabilities joined the workforce.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Table S1810: Disability Characteristics*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (2022), <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1810>.

<sup>2</sup> NAT’L DISABILITY INST., *SMALL BUSINESS OWNERSHIP BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES* 1-2, 13-14 (Apr. 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Danielle Fallon-O’Leary, *6 Funding Opportunities for Disabled Entrepreneurs*, U.S. CHAMBER OF COM. (Nov. 1, 2023), <https://www.uschamber.com/co/run/business-financing/funding-options-for-disabled-entrepreneurs>.

In conclusion, the legislation would require the Small Business Administration (SBA) and National Council on Disability (NCD) to collaborate to help people with disabilities pursue small business ownership and employment opportunities and submit a report to Congress about related activities and accomplishments.



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