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Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Human Resources

Welfare Reform Reauthorization
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Good morning, Chairman Boustany, Ranking Member Doggett, and distinguished members of the Committee I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the next phase of welfare reform.

I am currently the senior vice president of Fedcap Rehabilitation Services, Inc.'s workforce development practice area. Fedcap is a non-profit human services company that specializes in addressing the economic well-being of those with barriers to work. My comments today will center around the provisions found in H.R. 2968 and H.R. 2952 on casework, employment and retention as much of what we do is consistent with these bills.

Fedcap administers a wide range of employment programs including placement services for the court involved individual re-entering the workforce, placing veterans as well as public assistance recipients. We also provide employment service for those with reported mental health and other barriers which we deliver through comprehensive case management that helps these individuals reach their highest levels of self-sufficiency. Each year we place thousands into employment and in one of our largest programs called WeCARE (Wellness, Comprehensive, Assessment Rehabilitation and Employment), we continue to consistently exceed our originally established performance goals for job placement by 34 percent while maintaining a job retention rate at 6-months of just over 73 percent.

To achieve these outcomes we employ a strength based assessment model where we seek to learn what our program participants can do rather than focusing on their weaknesses. This is one of several aspects of successful engagement that I will be discussing with you today.

Engagement really begins with our receptionist however relationship building is established with our case managers whom we refer to as our “Ambassadors of Self-Sufficiency”. They serve as the first line of contact, conveying in words, and in action the very intent of program. These front line experts do more than simply intake and assessment if they are going to be effective. Successful case management begins with an understanding that the person engaging with you has just been faced with making a significant lifestyle change. Our front line ambassadors know that they are the key to helping that person see opportunity.

Our unique approach to case management begins with a set of mental tools. Henry Ford once said, “Whether you think you can or think you can’t you are right.” Mr. Ford was referring to what is commonly known as the Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophecy. In short, what you expect is what you get so we expect success and shift paradigms upfront. Since we expect our participants to work we refer to them as “jobseekers” from that point forward. Core to our success is our belief that (1) there are jobs (2) people are better off working (3) people do want to work. Let me discuss each briefly. (1) There are jobs: We remind our jobseekers that despite the unemployment rate one job is all they need and that employers have openings; (2) People are better off working: there are many reasons why we work, work adds to a person’s self-esteem, it improves their lifestyle, work can provide opportunity and hope for the future, work is a platform where each of us can add to an employer’s business or our communities or advance a cause, and work is a way to keep our minds and skills sharp and its one of the primary ways we manifest our potential. There is a certain dignity that comes from work that only work can provide; and (3) People want to work: A pathway to the best job for a person can be gained from taking a job now.

In our initial face-to-face meeting our case managers conduct one of several assessments-they conduct a mock interview on the spot! Within the first few minutes we look to see if the jobseeker is “employer ready”. With a sense of urgency we get the jobseeker placed immediately or track them quickly, often the same day, into a second more formal assessment called a diagnostic vocational evaluation or DVE. The DVE is a battery of assessment tools that is designed to help the jobseeker understand their work-based strengths. The outcome of the DVE is the basis for development of the jobseeker’s individual plan for employment which includes among other things the top three jobs they are looking to obtain. The plan is established, agreed upon and signed by the job seeker and case manager. We then fortify this with an action plan that clearly identifies the jobseeker’s short and long term goals, the initial work activity assigned, the hours assigned as well as identifying a full range of work supports that might be needed similar to what is proposed in the TANF reauthorization draft.

For the exception of a few work activities, most assignments are no more than 12 weeks in length. To extend an activity beyond 12 weeks a comprehensive employment plan review and a new plan with new goals must be established. The draft TANF reauthorization envisions this same approach-meeting every three months to review progress and determine next steps.

We also provide case management and seek progress reviews even after the employment begins. Once an individual is employed we typically meet with them once per week for the first two months (in their off hours), and no less than monthly for the next four months. This is consistent with the focus on outcomes in the draft and is one way to get states to follow recipients after they leave for work to make sure they don't come right back.

While we believe that our philosophy might be unique, the idea of assessments and employment plans is not unique, however, there are elements of delivery that make them effective. In my previous work I have seen the value of well communicated employment plans. For example, whether it was in Wisconsin under an AFDC waiver, or in Minnesota as the state established the new work expectations under the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), communicating engagement expectations through plans such as these is how the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program ushered in the reciprocal responsibility required over its predecessor welfare program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in which welfare was an entitlement. Working in these states I saw first-hand the changes in policy and how solid case management practices established clear expectations on the front line.

Personal responsibility is at the core of the TANF program. Effective case management, regular progress reviews, clear, practical action plans for employment and retention can often provide the necessary engagement to help more people establish their own employment futures.

I along with the other members of this panel stand ready to work with you to make economic independence for America's neediest families a reality.

I would be happy to answer any questions you have.