

Minority Views

H.R. 7985, the “Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Reporting Act of 2024”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 44.1 million Americans are individuals with disabilities.¹ Individuals with disabilities are a highly diverse group. They include people with physical disabilities, such as vision or hearing impairments and chronic conditions, and mental or developmental disabilities, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorders, and Down syndrome. Furthermore, 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. Yet, 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 their work scheduling and environment.² In fact, there are approximately 1.8 million small businesses owned by people with disabilities in the U.S.³ Starting and owning a small business is a major pathway for all Americans, especially people with disabilities, to achieve prosperity – a dynamic reflected by the fact that 99.9 percent of American businesses are small businesses.

Every American deserves the opportunity to contribute to society as productive workers and entrepreneurs, and to actively improve their quality-of-life. However, ableism and other unique structural barriers impede entrepreneurs with disabilities from fully participating in the business community.⁴

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.”

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

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

³ 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>.

⁴ OFF. OF ADVOCACY, *2023 Small Business Profile: United States*, U.S. SMALL BUS. ADMIN. 1 (Nov. 14, 2023), <https://advocacy.sba.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-Small-Business-Economic-Profile-US.pdf>.

H.R. 7985 would requires the Small Business Administration to submit a report to Congress on the challenges facing entrepreneurs with disabilities within 180 days of enactment of the legislation.



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