

TESTIMONY TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON INCREASING COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

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SUBMITTED BY ESMÉ GRANT, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, ANCOR

Dear Distinguished Members of the Advisory Committee,

Thank you for providing the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) with the opportunity to provide public testimony on this most important issue of employing individuals with disabilities. ANCOR is a national trade association representing more than 800 private providers of community living and employment supports and services to more than 400,000 individuals with disabilities, primarily individuals with intellectual, developmental and other significant disabilities. Our prime goal is to be the indispensable leader, resource and advocate for a diverse private disability services network that ensures full citizenship and engaged community participation for people with disabilities of all ages.

We would like to take this opportunity to emphasize the expertise of our membership, support transition with a focus on real outcomes, highlight the perspective of providers, address issues of direct support professionals and their role in job support, and finally, to support the use of technology in addressing the employment issues before this Committee.

ANCOR MEMBERSHIP

This year ANCOR celebrates its 45th year of providing a shared direction for how our nation provides services to people with disabilities. Our membership is our greatest strength and endows us with a deep wealth of expertise on issues that are evolving in the field, how states are translating federal law into practice, and what barriers exist to achieving greater integrated employment. Our members include organizations that are leading the way on innovation and use of technology in providing access to integrated employment. ANCOR members also include organizations that were created decades ago as an alternative to institutionalization, but now face the challenge of updating their programs to continue to fund and provide services while aligning them with new ongoing federal rules and policies. We represent a wide array of organizations. Our members are large and small, local and cross-state, profit and non-profit. We believe that the range of members that we represent provides us access to many different sides of issues and therefore helps us to collaborate and develop solutions that are unique, thoughtful, and focused on the best outcome for the individual.

TRANSITION WITH REAL OUTCOMES

ANCOR is supportive of policies and regulations that seek to integrate individuals with disabilities in society and furthermore, to continue the evolution of the disability rights movement as it continues to progress. We are cognizant, however, that we cannot neglect the challenges that individuals with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities face in achieving competitive, integrated employment. For those that we serve who are medically fragile or have significant disabilities, we request that the Advisory Committee host conversations with a broad group of stakeholders to share perspectives, challenges, ideas, and determine how we can work together to achieve a way forward. It is essential that recommendations of the Advisory Committee focus on real outcomes for a broad range of individuals that will result in a better quality of life, not simply the hope for one.

PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE

We want to ensure that the perspective of providers is considered when making recommendations to the Secretary. Our members pride themselves on providing quality services to the community and playing an essential role in the implementation of guaranteed civil rights. However, providers face specific obstacles to ensuring that they can provide services that will support these rights. Although the intention and goal is always to do more, unfunded mandates, cuts to program funding, and a severe deficit and high turnover in the direct support professional workforce impede upon the progress that our members are capable of achieving. It is essential, therefore, that the Secretary consider these perspectives and actively collaborate with our workforce as we seek to achieve the same shared goals of community, integration, and equality.

DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

Our membership feels strongly that we cannot address the issue of employment, particularly for people with significant disabilities, without addressing the serious issues facing the direct support professional workforce. The current environment of provision of services is stressed and unsustainable. Our members seek to work with the Secretary to understand how funding streams and training can support individual, person-centered, job support to ensure individuals are in the employment setting of their choice and maximizing their full potential. While we continue to encourage a culture of continuous improvement and best practice, we will not achieve progress in the area of employment for people with significant disabilities if we do not address the issue of the workforce that supports this community.

TECHNOLOGY

ANCOR is committed to efficient practices and services provided through technology advancement and supporting accessible technologies that allow individuals with disabilities to live more independently. Currently our membership is working on comprehensive comments to the recently shared draft of regulations for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and we are pleased to see the inclusion of and support for technology solutions and simplify transition and support for individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

The Advisory Committee is charged with an incredible task and the important duty of guiding the Department of Labor on an extraordinarily complex topic. ANCOR, with its diverse membership an unwavering commitment in this field, feels strongly that we must be a partner in this discussion. We encourage you to use ANCOR as a resource, invite us into your discussions, and take into account our comments as you form your reports to the Secretary.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to comment. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me for any further information.

Sincerely,

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