

January 13, 2015

Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive  
Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities  
U.S. Department of Labor  
Suite S-1303  
200 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Committee Members:

As an organization providing employment and valuable services and supports to people with disabilities, Goodwill Industries International, Inc. (GII), appreciates this opportunity to submit comments on the work of the Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities (the Committee). Goodwill® has a long history of providing employment and training opportunities to people who face challenges to employment, including people with disabilities. Furthermore, Goodwill has a strong track record of using and innovating an array of employment tools and strategies to provide job opportunities and services that help people mitigate their employment challenges. In 2013, the Goodwill enterprise reported serving nearly 9.8 million people, including nearly 279,000 individuals who reported a physical or mental disability was their primary barrier to employment.

### **People with Disabilities Need Employment Opportunities**

Today's labor market appears to offer limited employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities. In December 2014, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that the portion of working-age people with disabilities in the labor force was only 31.7 percent compared to 71.8 percent for working-age persons without disabilities. The unemployment rate for those with disabilities was 11.2 percent, compared with 5.1 percent for persons without disabilities, not seasonally adjusted. With one in five adults living in the United States having a disability and more than 22 million families nationwide with one or more members with disabilities, the need for employment opportunities for people with disabilities affects us all.

These numbers convey the difficult realities regarding employment for people with disabilities. Goodwill, like you, is dissatisfied with these realities and is working toward new solutions to create more opportunities for all community members, including people with disabilities.

### **Goodwill Services Connect People to Opportunities**

Goodwill prepares people with disabilities for a variety of positions in industries including retail, banking, hospitality, food service, packing and assembly, manufacturing, and health care. Job readiness or employability classes equip people for workplace demands. Job seekers can access career coaching, connections to employers and job search assistance. Goodwill career counselors work one-on-one with job seekers to access training and employment opportunities as guided by individualized career plans.

Our collective aspirations with and for people with significant disabilities include opportunities for choice, to earn wages, to reach potential, to experience improved quality of life, and to achieve social acceptance and integration. Services are customized with and for the individual, include his or her support system, leverage community resources, and are delivered recognizing that the individual is both the leader of his or her service plan and a customer of Goodwill.

The following employment programs and services are among those provided by Goodwill for people with disabilities:

- Individualized job placement and support services
- Supported employment services
- On-the-job training
- Intensive job placement services
- Work assessment and evaluation
- Rehabilitation programs that assist individuals with physical recovery
- Resources for farmers and ranchers with disabilities through the AgrAbility partnership
- Job readiness, soft skills and work adjustment training
- Occupational skills training
- Job center, job fair and non-intensive job placement services
- Job retention and/or career advancement services
- Career centers that assist with job searches, writing résumés and strengthening interview skills
- Placement in jobs with businesses and state and federal governments
- Community and work center employment using the special minimum wage certificate
- Assistance with state and federal tax filing
- E-learning

In addition, more than 75 community-based Goodwill agencies collectively fulfill more than 350 AbilityOne<sup>®</sup> contracts that employ more than 7,000 individuals while providing them job coaching and additional skills training. AbilityOne is the largest provider of employment opportunities for people who are either blind or have significant disabilities, employing approximately 48,000 people through more than 600 nonprofit agencies.

People employed through Goodwill contracting services work in industries such as customer relations, administrative support, document management, office administration, manufacturing, food service preparation, custodial services, and grounds keeping. Goodwill believes work, whether it is employment in Goodwill retail stores, on a contract, or in one of the 261,000 community job placements made last year, creates economic energy that builds strong families and strong communities.

### **Creating Solutions Together**

Goodwill Industries<sup>®</sup> was supportive of the bi-partisan agreement put forth by members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, (WIOA). This agreement, Section 511 of the bill, focuses on transition-age youth with disabilities. Goodwill looks forward to contributing to the development of rules and regulations as the new law is implemented. Goodwill is optimistic that Section 511 will result in an increase in the number of transition-aged youth entering and succeeding in competitive integrated employment. Goodwill also supports policies that would increase employment-first initiatives and supported employment programs.

As the Committee moves forward with its work to craft recommendations on ways to increase integrated competitive employment opportunities for people with disabilities, Goodwill stands ready to be a resource and partner. On behalf of Goodwill Industries International and its network of 158 community-based Goodwill agencies in the United States, thank you for the opportunity to comment. Should you have any questions pertaining to Goodwill Industries' comments please contact me at [jim.gibbons@goodwill.org](mailto:jim.gibbons@goodwill.org) or 240-333-5202, or Laura Walling, GII Director of Advocacy and Legislative Affairs, at [laura.walling@goodwill.org](mailto:laura.walling@goodwill.org) or 240-333-5378.

Sincerely,



Jim Gibbons  
President & CEO