Dear Senator:

We, a delegation from the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland, recently requested to meet with you in your Baltimore office during the August congressional recess to discuss a critical issue that could adversely affect blind and other disabled people in our state. We have subsequently received a polite, yet disconcerting response saying that your calendar is completely full and that you will be unable to meet with us. The Senate HELP Committee passed the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), S. 1356, on Wednesday, July 31; otherwise, we would not have made this request on such short notice. Given that this action took place just before the recess, and also because of the urgency of the issues involved, we would greatly appreciate it if you would re-evaluate your schedule to identify a date and time to meet with us while you are in the district.

The WIA reauthorization bill contains language in Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act that will authorize vocational rehabilitation agencies to use an antiquated, discriminatory subminimum-wage provision to provide training and employment that costs more, produces poorer outcomes, and actually teaches skills that need to be unlearned in order for an individual with a disability to obtain competitive integrated employment. We have been told that this bill may come to the Senate floor for debate in September. Therefore, it is imperative that we meet with you during the August recess in order to determine if you are willing to offer and support an amendment to strike Title V. Section 511 from the WIA language.

It is our hope that if you are unable to meet with us personally, you will allow us to meet with a member of your staff who has the authority to speak on your behalf about this critically important issue. Additionally, we would appreciate it if you would provide us a list of your public town hall events. We look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,