March XX, 2014

Dear Congressman / **Representative**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_:

I am writing to express serious concerns with two specific provisions under debate as part of Workforce Investment Act (WIA) reauthorization legislation. Our organization opposes the following two provisions, which **will be extremely detrimental to individuals with disabilities who are eligible for the individualized services and supports provided by highly skilled rehabilitation counselors in the Vocational Rehabilitation program.**

* The proposed move of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) from the Department of Education (DOE) to the Department of Labor (DOL); and
* Section 511, related to employment of individuals with disabilities at a subminimum wage.

These proposals are steps in the wrong direction at a time when it is critical to support career development and self-sufficiency for **individuals** with disabilities. While these provisions originated in the Senate bill (S.1356), pre-conferencing is underway between House and Senate Committee staff, and it is critical that the House stand firm in opposition to both of these provisions.

The proposed move of RSA to DOL is entirely inconsistent with efforts to improve **and increase** services to young people transitioning from school to **post –secondary education or careers**. **Efforts should be focused on increasing collaboration and partnerships in the DOE between RSA and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), in order to improve transition services, as opposed to moving RSA to DOL where this focus would be lost.** There is no data to indicate that moving the RSA from the DOE to the DOL would improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, particularly those individuals with the most significant disabilities, **including transition youth.**

Section 511, while well intentioned, will strengthen and give legitimacy to the flawed subminimum wage system and is based on the false premise that people with disabilities cannot be competitively employed. This policy proposal faces strong opposition from the community it is meant to serve. The language endorses the practice of using subminimum wage environments for training or employment, and does not meet the intended goal of reducing the number of young people tracked into subminimum wage work environments.

**Individuals who are tracked into these environments usually remain there and dependent on government subsidies and other state income supports.**

**Since the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, State VR Agencies have focused on providing community based services and assuring that all individuals with disabilities determined eligible for VR Services have the opportunity to pursue competitive employment in an integrated setting. Opening the door to sheltered employment takes the VR Program and the people they serve backwards. It would undermine the forward progress and success that the program has achieved over the years in pursuing competitive, integrated employment for VR Consumers.**

We believe there are far better ways to help ensure that individuals with disabilities can be productive without Section 511, and we believe strengthening VR within the DOE is the best approach to securing access to competitive employment opportunities for **individuals** with disabilities.

We urge you to keep these two controversial provisions out of any final WIA reauthorization package. The bill with these proposals included faces strong opposition from the disability community**.**

**Thank you for your attention to the concerns of your constituents.**

Sincerely,