Dear Senator:

A delegation from the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland, the state’s most influential group of blind Marylanders, would like 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. On Wednesday, July 31, the Senate HELP Committee passed S. 1356, the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The 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. This bill will probably be coming to the Senate floor for debate in September. That is why it is imperative that we get to meet with you during the August recess.

Some 400,000 Americans with disabilities, many of whom live in Maryland, are already victims of the false perception of incapacity perpetuated by Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which leaves them working in jobs that pay less than the federal minimum wage. This grave situation is a legacy of outdated laws and outdated assumptions about the capabilities of people with disabilities, and it stands to afflict even more disabled workers if incorporated into the Rehabilitation Act.

The National Federation of the Blind is the leading advocate for fair wages for workers with disabilities. We support the implementation and further development of proven strategies to employ all people with disabilities in real jobs at competitive wages. We are advocating that Section 511 of Title V. of the WIA be removed, as we work to have Section 14(c) of the FLSA phased out.

We respectfully request the opportunity to speak with you as soon as possible to discuss how we can work together to address this critical issue. Please have your scheduler contact me as soon as possible to set up a meeting. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,